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2023 Gold Medallist Kerstin Thompson

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(FOREWORD)

Good design is for everyone, everywhere

The Australian Institute of Architects works in the belief that everyone benefits from good architecture. Good design is not something to be reserved for a wealthy few. Our regional towns profit from highly considered built environments as much as our cities. And our homes, be they in suburban areas or remote desert communities, are just as worthy of architectural design as our big public structures. This core belief influences us all: staff, volunteers, National Council and Board of Directors. As I approach the end of my term as National President, I am moved by the immense amount of work – some that I took part in, some that I witnessed firsthand – the Institute did to uphold these principles in the past year. While there is always more to do, I think it is important that we take time to appreciate what we have achieved.

At National Council, we implemented a new mandatory sustainability framework for our awards. This accomplishment took a substantial amount of volunteer and staff hours. It is the result of an engaged membership who demand that we take up a position: thought leaders in the built environment community and wider society. Good architecture is known for its beauty, functionality and support of the people who exist within and around it, but this new sustainability framework marks a major shift in the profession. It is the first step toward ensuring award-winning architecture is intrinsically designed to benefit the local landscape and, ultimately, the planet. In coming years, there will be no need for a Sustainability Award, as all awards will represent best-practice – and therefore sustainable – work.

At the Board level, we supported the establishment of a First Nations Advisory Group. This group has been several years in the making and ensures that the remarkable work being done by our First Nations Advisory Committee is enshrined in everything we do as an organization, from the Board down.

Recently, I accepted an invitation to march in the 2023 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras as part of World Pride. Architects with Pride is an initiative that was established by a group of highly dedicated practices and individuals; the Institute is just a small part of it. Being welcomed to stand among people who are all too often marginalized – and to join in celebrating their great diversity, creativity and love of our profession – was an intensely humbling experience. As could be expected, every design detail from the float to our outfits demonstrated the great imagination, determination and skill that architects are known for.

From a more personal standpoint, the role of National President has allowed me to take a place in an extraordinary leadership team across staff, volunteers and the Board. I have had the privilege to meet not only architects I have personally admired throughout my career, but also many practitioners who are set to become the architects we look up to in the years ahead. I have greatly appreciated the chance to represent our members and our Australian profession at international forums. These experiences have given me a new-found respect and passion for the work of our International Chapter members.

It is always a great pleasure to celebrate the achievements of our members and profession at large. The winners of the 2023 National Prizes are published in this issue; the most anticipated of these prizes is of course the Gold Medal, given in recognition of a career of service to architecture. The 2023 Gold Medallist, Kerstin Thompson, is a most deserving winner whose work is as highly regarded internationally as it is within Australia. Through service to the profession beyond her own project work, Thompson has addressed some of the biggest issues of our time and had an influence that will last for generations.

Finally, the year I've spent chairing National Council has only strengthened my belief in the benefit of robust collegial debate. Through respectful, open-hearted conversation, the work of National Council has been focused and productive. Above all else, it has propelled our organization and our profession forward from a position of unified strength. I offer my heartfelt thanks to all current and past councillors who have worked so hard toward a common goal.

In my first Foreword, I wrote that what motivates my work with the Institute is the same thing that has been a focus of my career: the relationship between people, place and space. As I come to the end of my term, I realize with deep gratitude that it is the people behind the architecture we all enjoy who have left indelible imprints on my memories of this year.

— Shannon Battisson, National President,
Australian Institute of Architects

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(REFLECTION)

Beyond the boundaries of practice

(ACKNOWLEDGEMENT) We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognize their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

During the final throes of organizing a Design Speaks symposium co-curated by Kerstin Thompson and Phillip Arnold, I received a call from the Institute with the name of the 2023 Gold Medallist. “I think you’ll be happy,” I was told. And I was – Kerstin had deservingly achieved the highest honour. I immediately called to congratulate her – and to warn her that although it might seem that our time working together would end with the symposium, we were about to embark on another big project: compiling the *Architecture Australia* tribute to her practice (page 77).

Kerstin’s architectural work demonstrates a depth of thought that is not only visible in the drawings and built outcomes, but also astutely articulated in words by Kerstin herself – not always such a natural skill for an architect. Her ability to communicate her approach, ideas and considerations makes her an incredibly valuable mentor, teacher and advocate for architecture. The many anecdotes collected here consistently refer to her generous and collaborative approach, and Justine Clark’s opening essay (page 78) reflects on Kerstin’s engagement beyond the office, noting that “this is also imbricated with the world of the practice … These activities help make space for the development of ideas that then reverberate between these various worlds.”

Kerstin Thompson Architects’ built work spans all typologies, with four main themes emerging: responding to circumstance; a companionship between new and old; landscape and interconnectivity; and responding to people’s inhabitation of place. In our tribute, four written pieces reflect these themes, with each followed by a selection of relevant projects. The concluding piece shares an engaging written exchange between Kerstin and one of her clients that gives deep insight into Kerstin’s design thinking and general approach – and her offer to let us publish this reinforces her generous spirit and transparency in the way she works.

The Gold Medal coverage sits within the announcement of the Institute’s 2023 National Prizes, recognizing a group of people who are dedicated to advocacy and advancement of the profession; they work beyond the boundaries of practice and seek to have an impact in the broader industry. Congratulations to all those recognized this year.

Alongside the National Prizes, a series of diverse educational projects is reviewed in this issue: a city university student precinct, temporary accommodation for mature-aged First Nations students in Darwin and a regional TAFE building used by both students and the local community. We also review a pair of houses – one in Victoria and the other in New South Wales – that are similarly designed to both occupy the landscape and respect its magnificence and power.

Finally, you might also notice a design refresh in this issue of *Architecture Australia*. After five years – a testament to the robustness of their design template – we’ve said goodbye to Years Months Days. Our new designer, AKLR, comes on board with fresh energy and enthusiasm. In particular, we’ve briefed them to imbue our special themed issues with greater flexibility and expression. We’re looking forward to seeing how this will evolve – watch this space!

— Katelin Butler, Editorial Director

Editorial director Katelin Butler
Associate editor Georgia Birks
Managing editor Nicci Dodanwela
Editorial enquiries +61 3 8699 1000, aa@archmedia.com.au
Editorial team Linda Cheng, Jude Ellison, Cassie Hansen, Josh Harris, Alexa Kempton
Institute Advisory Committee Clare Cousins, Barnaby Hartford-Davis, Anna Rubbo, Shane Thompson, Geoff Warn
Contributing editors Andy Fergus, John Gollings, Carroll Go-Sam, Laura Harding, Rachel Hurst, Rory Hyde, Philip Vivian, Emma Williamson
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Company secretary Ian Close
General manager, operations Jane Wheeler
General manager, digital publishing Mark Scruby
General manager, sales Michael Pollard
Production Goran Rupena
Publication design AKLR Studio, aklr.xyz, alex@aklr.xyz
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advertising@archmedia.com.au
or +61 3 8699 1000

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(CORRECTION)

In “Why RAP? Implementing a Reconciliation Action Plan” by Samantha Rich (*Architecture Australia*, vol. 111, no. 6, November/December 2022, pages 12–13), the writer was incorrectly described as an “architectural designer.” Rich is a graduate of architecture.

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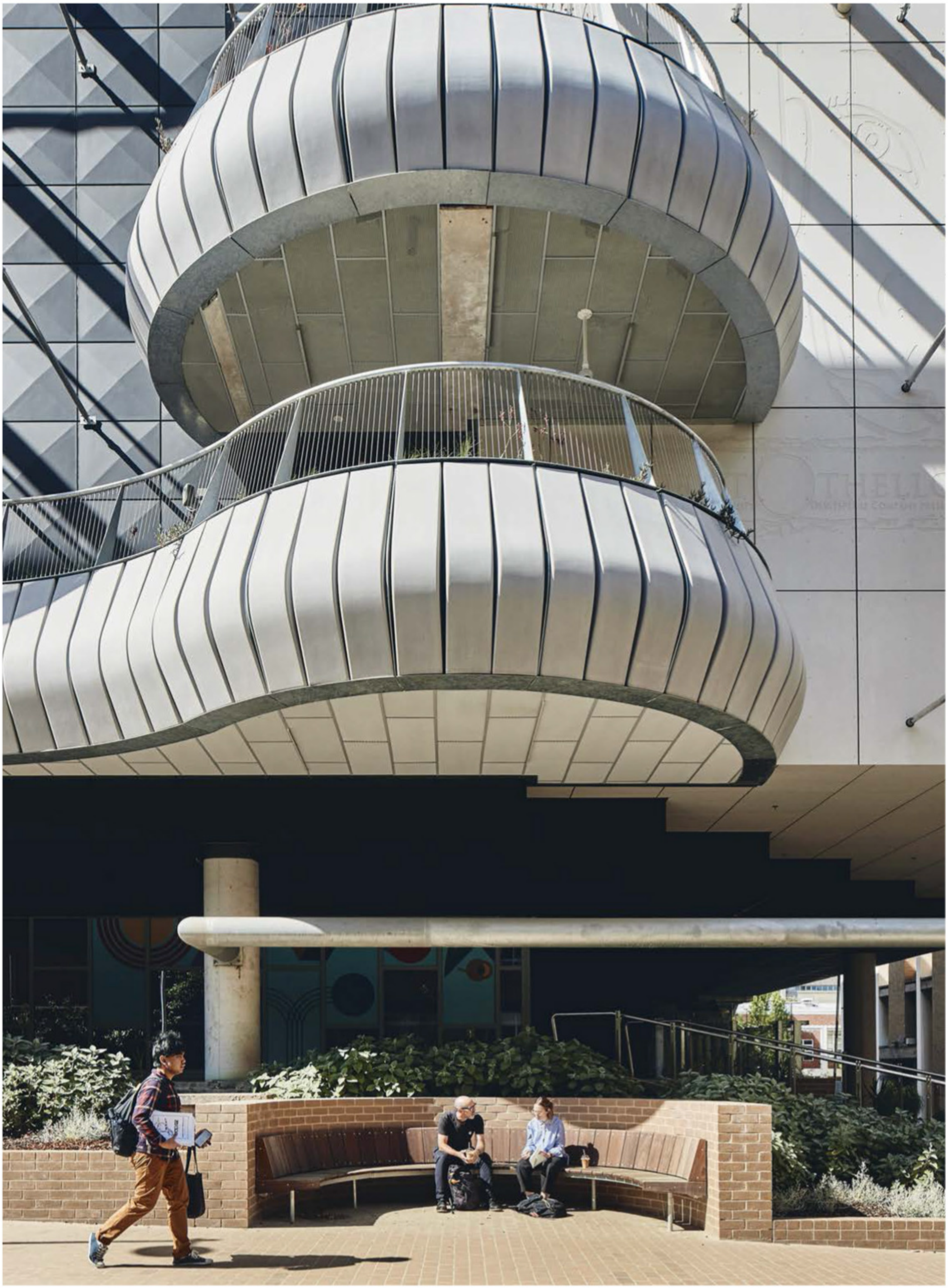
University of Melbourne Student Precinct Project

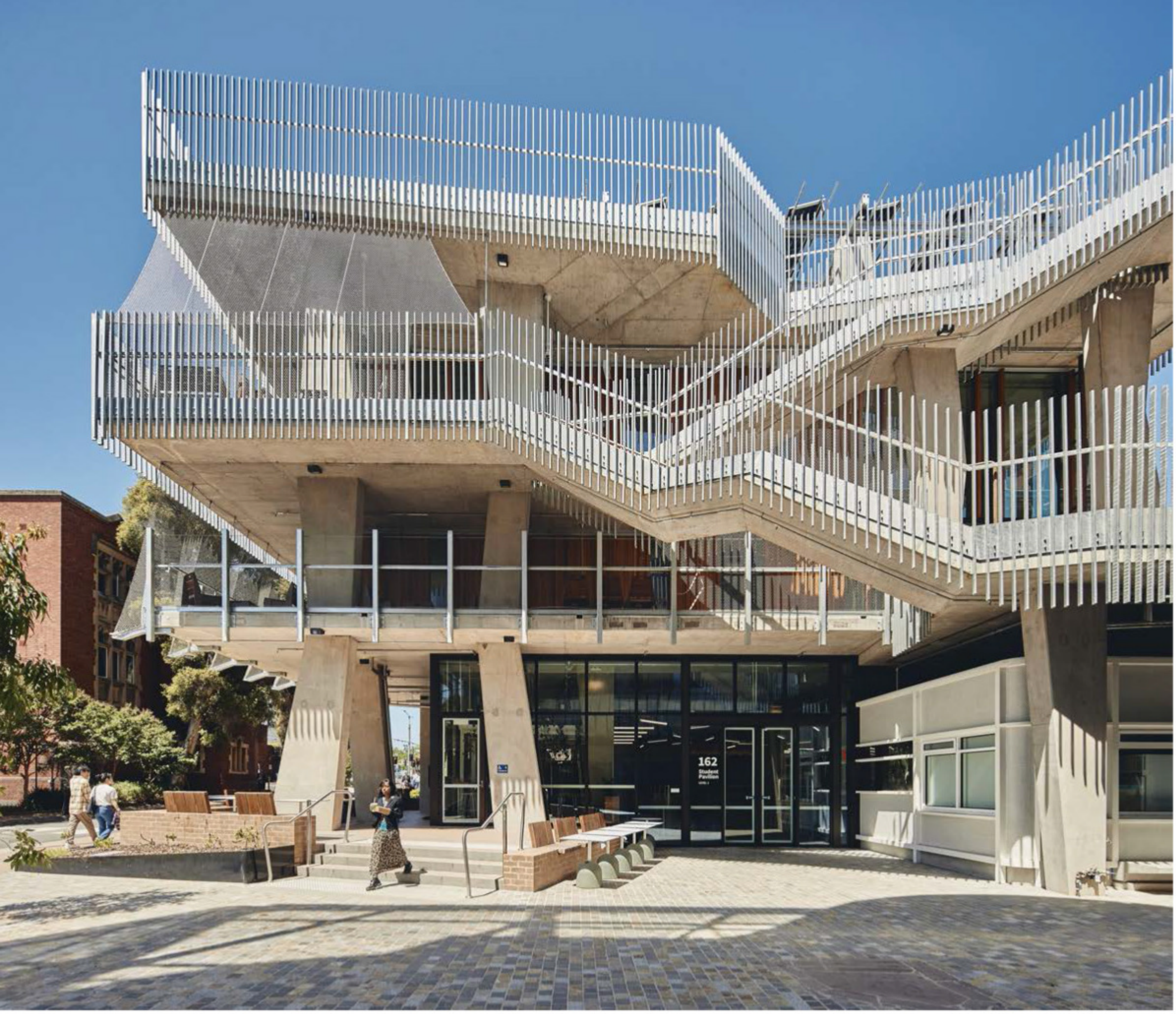
(COUNTRY)	Wurundjeri
(REVIEWER)	Rachel Hurst
(PHOTOGRAPHER)	Peter Bennetts

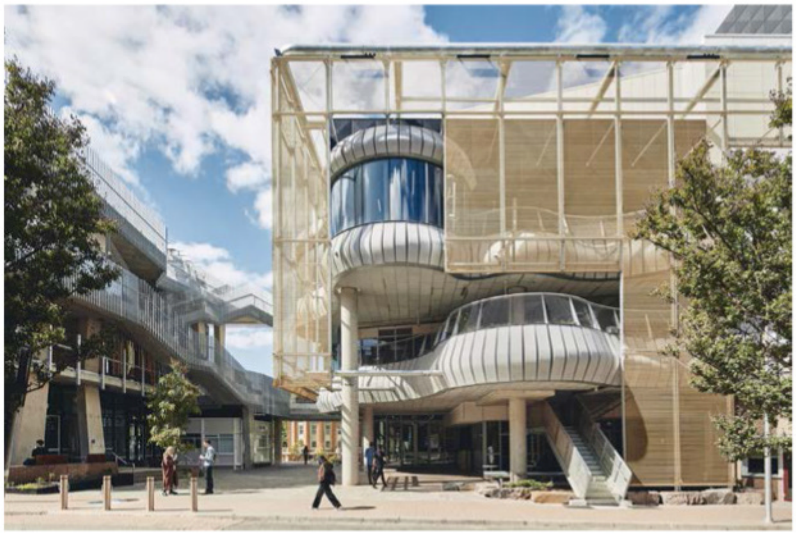
In an ambitious act of co-creation, a diverse group of practices has listened to more than 20,000 students and staff to design a student precinct that encourages connections – between people, disciplines, past and present, inside and out.

(ARCHITECTS)

Lyons with Koning Eizenberg Architecture, NMBW Architecture Studio, Greenaway Architects, Architects EAT, Aspect Studios and Glas Urban







(PREVIOUS)	Balconies “erode” the facade of the Arts and Cultural Building by Lyons, aiding in the precinct’s commitment to connect to its surroundings.
(ABOVE)	On top of the Student Pavilion, by Koning Eizenberg Architecture, students have access to a kitchen and events venue.
(LEFT)	The Arts and Cultural Building includes informal study spaces, theatres and galleries.
(OPPOSITE)	The brutalist Eastern Resource Centre has been redeveloped by Lyons to house library services, a technology hall, project rooms and a winter garden.

In the famous fifteenth-century painting *La Città ideale di Urbino*, a rotunda sits symmetrically on rigorously paved ground, with a harmonious backdrop of palazzi.[1] It's one of many utopian visions that propose rational, human-scaled architecture as key to civilized urbanity. Although it is 500 years and half-a-world distant from the project I'm standing in, it doesn't seem that far away in intent, or critical moves. The Student Precinct Project at the University of Melbourne deploys the same tactics of organizing ground plane, centrality, view and perspectival drama, albeit in an energetic, messy varsity version and for a more inclusive understanding of humanity than Renaissance society encompassed.

The principle of diversity underpins this massive project. Contemporary campus design is no longer the province of sole architecture practices, and the University of Melbourne recognized that with a competition brief for a near-whole city block redevelopment of 18,000 square metres, seven student facility buildings (including two libraries and two theatres), and 12,000 square metres of landscape, a multifaceted, collaborative team was vital to resist institutional homogeneity in the outcome. The winning team – of Lyons with Koning Eizenberg Architecture, NMBW Architecture Studio, Greenaway Architects, Architects EAT, Aspect Studios and Glas Urban – credits its success to prior achievements with RMIT University's New Academic Street project (2017), which demonstrated the richness of a precinct designed by multiple voices with cooperative, creative autonomy. The team was assembled with expertise across different scales and foci – from the intimate, social emphases of Koning Eizenberg and Architects EAT's work, to the placemaking proficiency of Aspect. Julie Eizenberg remarks that the extensive student consultation process revealed concerns about uniformity, gender differences and connection to nature. "Our team showed we could take on oddball parts of the brief, could attend to the holes in the environment, and could take on sustainability seriously," she says (although she assures me that Lyons are "the most fun lead architects" she has worked with).

"Co-creation with the students" was one of the main tenets of the brief; others include "precinct scale, landscape-led" and "co-location of services." This was a long-overdue project to respond to pedagogical and experiential shifts in tertiary education, and to upgrade facilities muddied by an agglomeration of ad hoc adaptations. A client representative at my site visit declared that the project had "exceeded expectations" – no small achievement given the complexity of the task and the COVID-affected construction.

The tenet of "reconciliation at scale" deserves particular mention, for both the ambitions of the University of Melbourne and the tripartite role of Jefa Greenaway as Indigenous knowledge broker to the university, interpreter of its Reconciliation Action Plan, and designer of architectural components within the scheme. Working with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung, Bunurong and Yorta Yorta Traditional Custodians, the university committed to the goal of "embedding in place" Indigenous connections at the outset. The Student Precinct Project is thus a signature project, advancing reconciliation within academia, from curriculum and policy to tangible physical moves. Based on thorough cultural mapping, consideration of the diaspora of First Nations people from across the country, and challenging

(OPPOSITE ABOVE) The Student Pavilion incorporates informal study and social spaces with strong connections to the outdoors.

(OPPOSITE BELOW) The Arts and Cultural Building has a particular focus on inclusion, with theatre spaces that welcome everyone, onstage and in the audience.

issues such as the university's colonial foundations, two tactics became fundamental: focusing on the primacy of Country, and revealing and remembering place. These are manifest across the project in the operational shaping of places for welcome ceremonies and centralized gatherings, the incorporation of commissioned Aboriginal designs in fitouts, and the planting of flora from all 45 Indigenous language groups represented in the university's student cohort throughout the site. The final piece of the puzzle is Greenaway, NMBW and Glas's Murrup Barak Melbourne Institute for Indigenous Development and Welcome Ground (to be completed in 2026), situated on the precinct's southern boundary and linking to the city's new Metro Tunnel infrastructure.

And fittingly, it is from the ground up – and down – that respect for Country is most potent in determining the spatial disposition and character of the scheme. Lyons credits a 2016 masterplan by Jackson Clements Burrows Architects with the critical move to radically excavate the site, revealing and smoothing the natural six-metre gradient that had been obliterated over years of incremental development. At some $35 million, this was the costliest single move of the enterprise, but it enabled seamless accessibility between buildings, visual permeability and heightened views through the precinct, and a genuine connection to real ground.

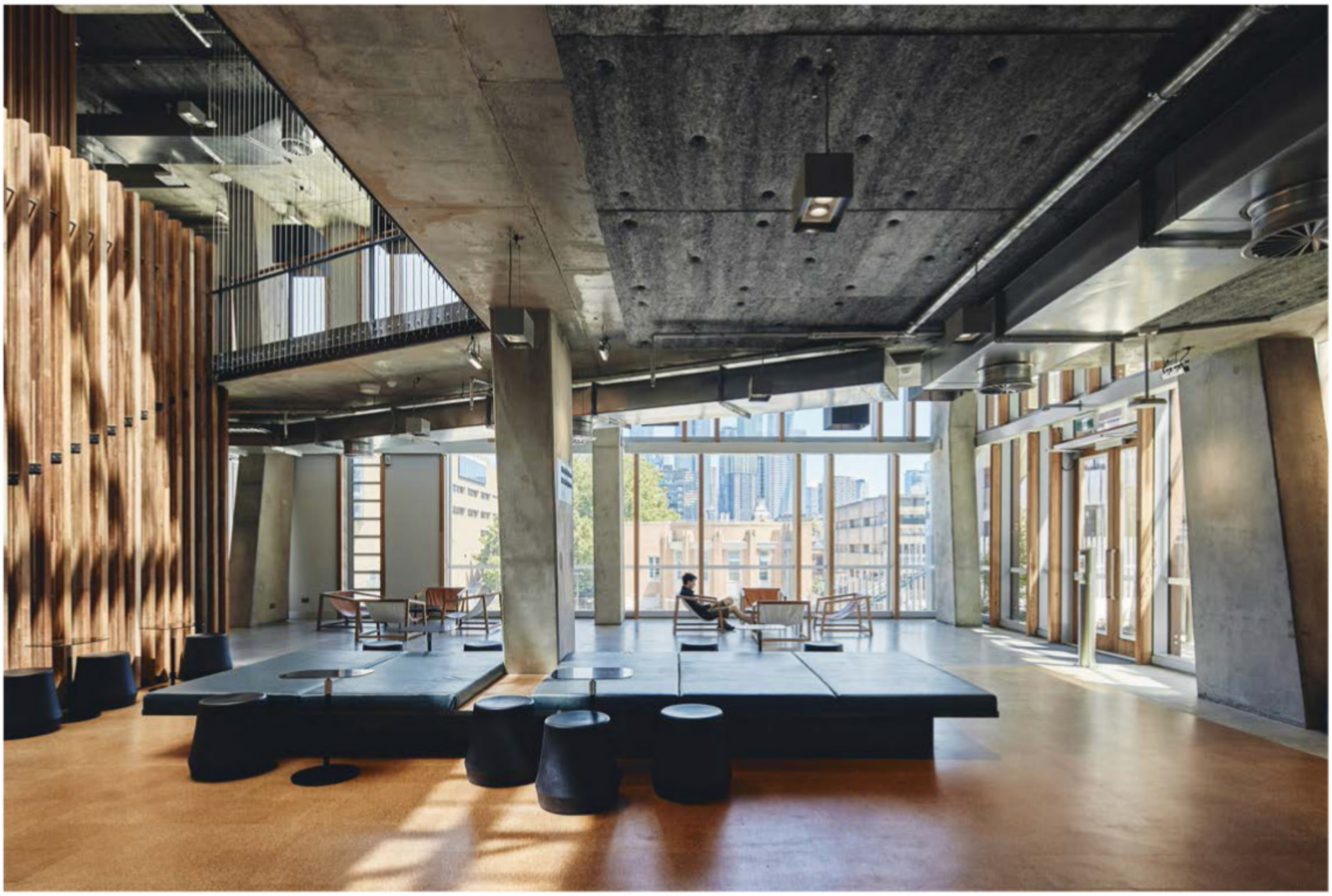
Though the original watercourse of Bouverie Creek had long since been submerged, its environmental and cultural histories (including stories of migratory eels springing up on the vice-chancellor's lawns!) became a further device for reinstating deeper links with place, and for practical measures of wayfinding and water management. Its path is traced across the surface of the site, inscribed in local mudstone, Castlemaine stone and granite, through buildings as organic shifts in floor level, and culminates in two ponds in the forthcoming Welcome Ground. Supported by native plantings and biodiverse landscaping, this move is an active archaeology of site, making natural systems visible even in the heart of urbanized Carlton.

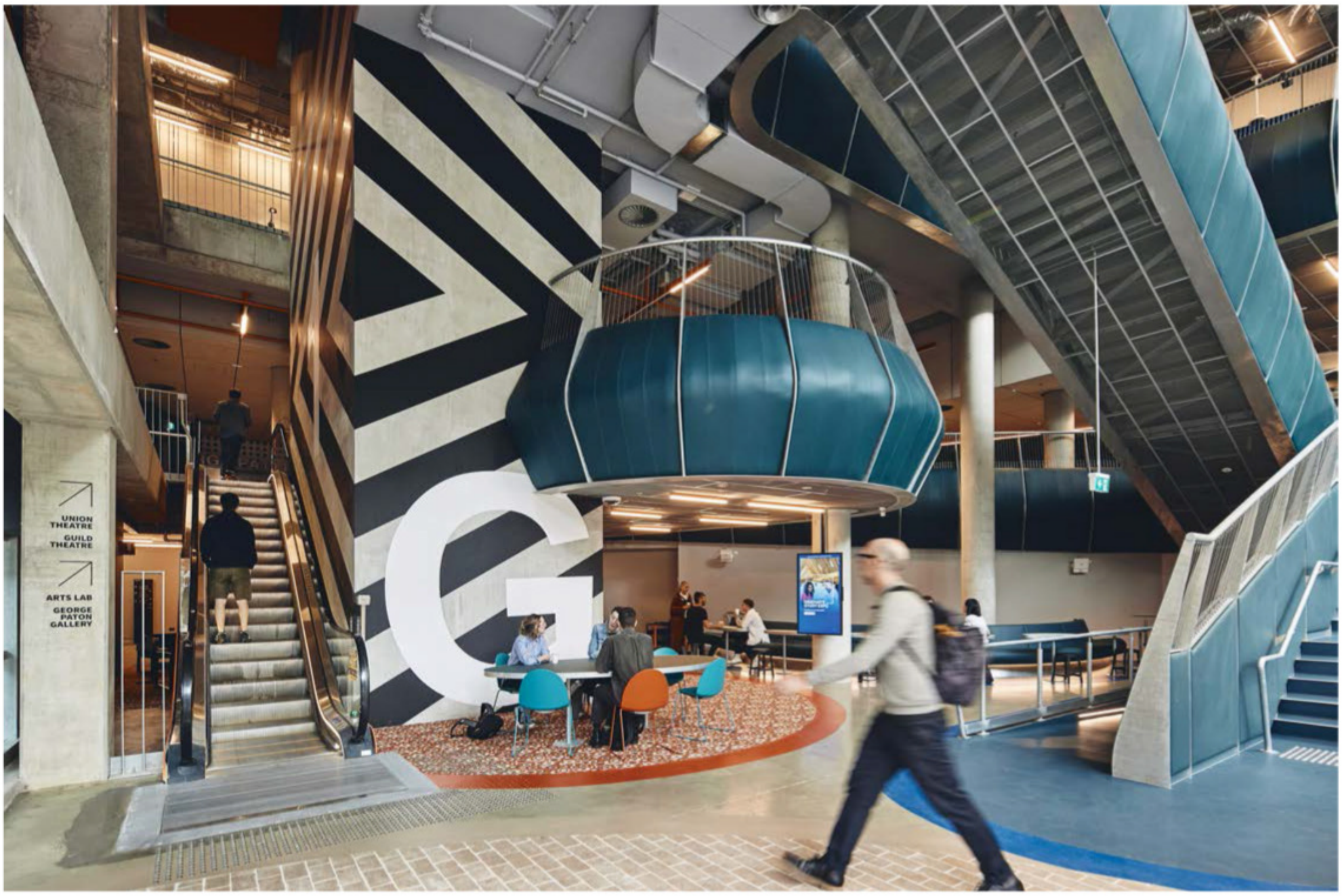
The suite of two new and five refurbished buildings make their own neighbourhood, around a large, informal amphitheatre, and the concept of theatricality infuses the architectural handling of most of the buildings. Extensive balconies, terraces and bridges erode the facades of the north and east backgrounds to the shared landscape, and provide everyday dramas of activity and visual exchange. As new additions to the precinct, Lyons' cutting-edge Arts and Cultural Building and Koning Eizenberg's ebullient Student Pavilion exploit this strategy spectacularly, with gold "scrim curtained" balconies and inhabitable mesh scaffolds, respectively. From these galleries, students can experience the life of the campus "in the round," as the ground plane wraps up and through the buildings' vertical streets, blurring boundaries between inside and out, between studying and relaxing, and between disciplines.

In fact, there are no discrete faculties here; instead, there is a generous cross-programming of facilities for the whole student population. Though some buildings – like NMBW's sensitive renovation of the 1888 Building for graduate students, or their ingenious inside-out rejuvenation of the student union in Building 168 – are focused on specific groups, student experience is not limited within any single building. Nor is studying treated as an unsociable pursuit: 25 to 30 percent of the overall floor area is informal study space, or "Living Labs" for university research projects, often with commercial spaces (through Architects EAT's perky hospitality pods and portals). And always connecting to outside and "the primacy of Country."

"Reconciliation at scale" is one of the agreed commonalities across this otherwise eclectic assemblage of buildings. Unlike the unified geometry and materiality of *La Città ideale*, the tectonic languages here read like a visual essay of the past 150 years of architectural history. Given that refurbishment formed the major component of the brief, this mix of architectural personalities is understandable and sustainable, and respects the unique history of the University of Melbourne. The new and the old are kept in conversation through a general use of raw and robust materials – concrete, masonry, timber and steel – articulated directly or with expressive abundance in areas of high traffic, such as in the "hedgehog" soffit of the Student Pavilion bridge.

One building strikes me as emblematic of the intelligent knit between the macro site strategies and the micro "lounge-away-from-home" ethos of the whole project, and it is – like many of the places

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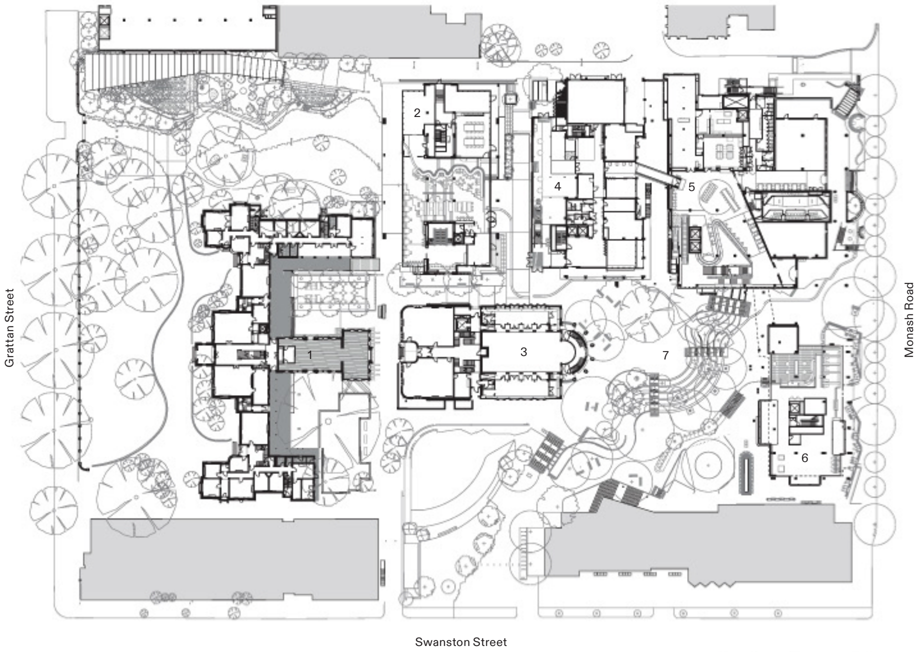
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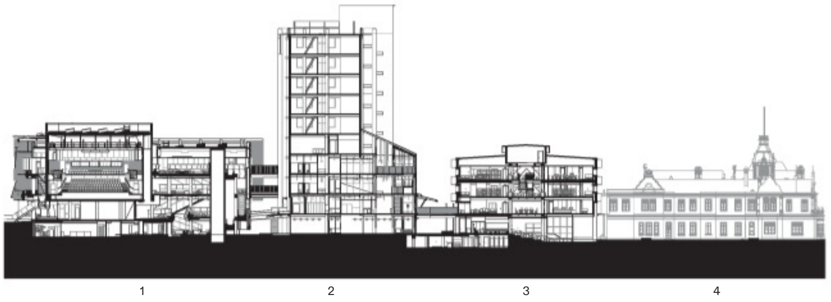
Precinct plan
1:2000

(PRECINCT PLAN KEY)

1 Building 1888
2 Eastern Resource Centre
3 Building 189
4 Building 168
5 Arts and Cultural Building
6 Student Pavilion
7 Amphitheatre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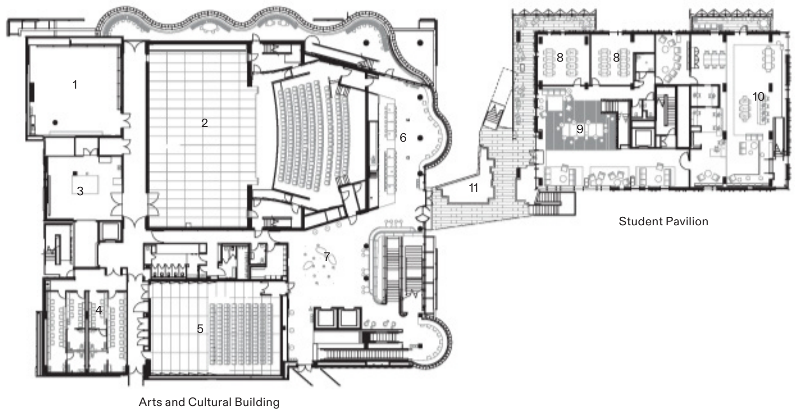
Precinct section
1:2000

(PRECINCT SECTION KEY)

1 Arts and Cultural Building
2 Building 168
3 Eastern Resource Centre
4 Building 1888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Student Pavilion
Arts and Cultural Building
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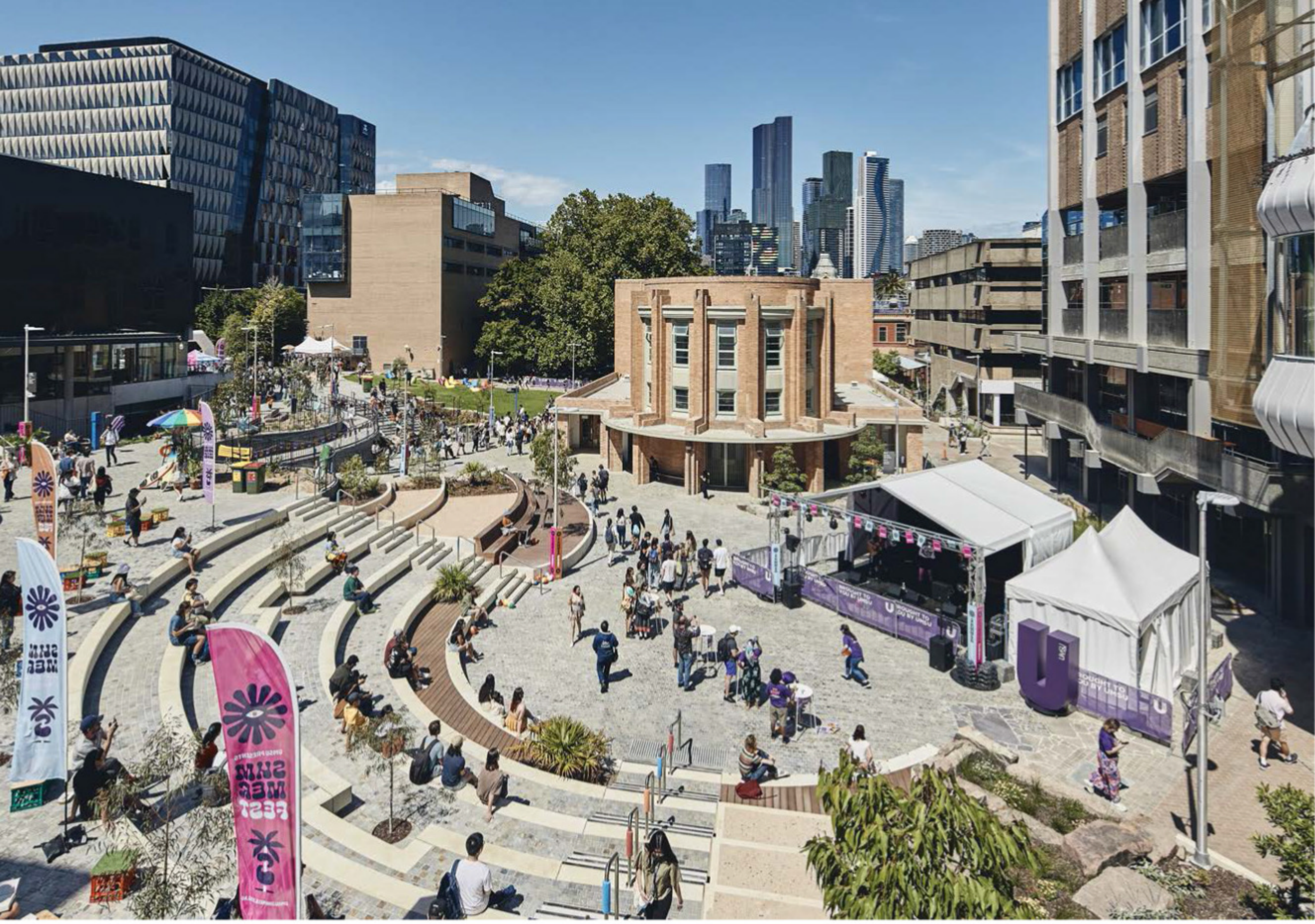
Arts and Cultural Building and Student Pavilion, level two
1:1000

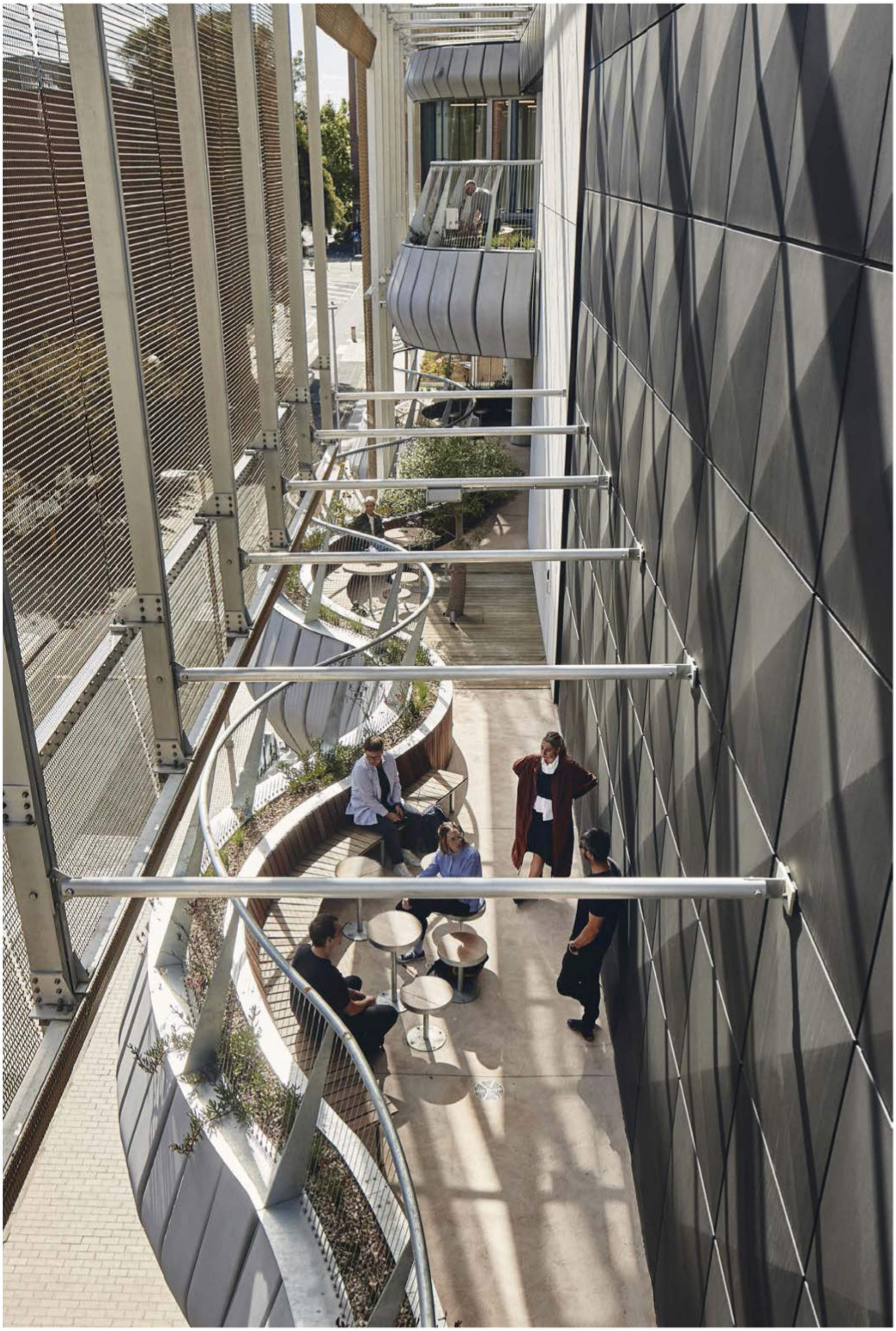
(ARTS AND CULTURAL BUILDING AND
STUDENT PAVILION, LEVEL TWO KEY)

1 Rehearsal
2 Union Theatre
3 Workshop
4 Arts workspace
5 Guild Theatre
6 Bar
7 Foyer
8 Activity rooms
9 Informal study
10 Rowden White Library
11 Bridge



(ABOVE) In the design of the public realm and landscape, by Aspect Studios with Glas Urban, the original course of Bouverie Creek is traced across the surface of the site, making natural systems visible in urbanized Carlton.

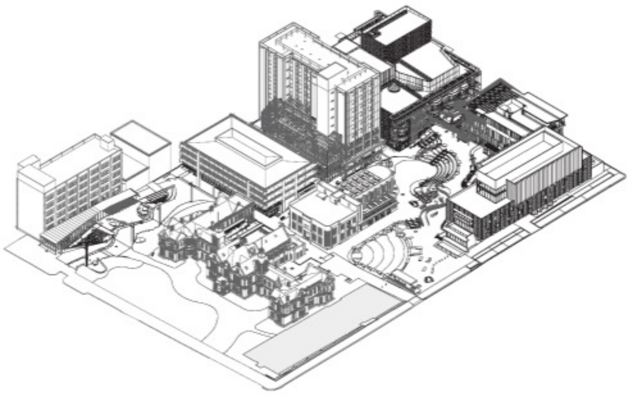
(RIGHT) The site was radically excavated, in line with a 2016 masterplan by Jackson Clements Burrows Architects, to reveal its natural six-metre gradient.



here – casually unprogrammed. The 1939 Art Deco shell of Building 189, formerly known as the Frank Tate Building,[2] has been carved out to create a double-volume hall with a mezzanine and glazed loggias, openable to the surrounds and adaptable for temporary events, markets and amphitheatre overspill. Sensitive adaptation reveals the fine grain of the original, while a series of interspersed resin "Identity Bricks" subtly embed potent motifs and stories of reconciliation. With its bisque masonry and elegant composition, the pavilion recalls the rotunda of *La Città ideale* – a receptive, stable locus for activities yet to be imagined.

Urbino's mythical city is devoid of inhabitants, almost like a prescient backcloth for an Instagrammable moment. As it awaits the start of the 2023 academic year, the Student Precinct Project has a similar quality: there are plenty of designed opportunities to capture nifty, enviable images of contemporary student life. And with its savvy eye on the importance of student experience, the university will no doubt be using social media to gauge the success of an investment governed by consultation, collaboration and ethical practice. By the time you read this, it might be worth searching for #lifeatunimelb or #studentlife to see how they're doing.

— Rachel Hurst is a senior adjunct research fellow at the University of South Australia and an experienced architectural educator. She is currently focussing on her freelance practice in architectural writing, speculative drawing and making.



Precinct axonometric
Not to scale

(OPPOSITE) The facade of the Arts and Cultural Building is conceived as a "social scaffold," providing another space for connection between people and with the site.

(BELOW) Lyons has integrated a new glass atrium into the 1970s Building 168, linking to the Eastern Resource Centre library.

Architect Lyons with Koning Eizenberg Architecture, NMBW Architecture Studio, Greenaway Architects, Architects EAT, Aspect Studios and Glas Urban; Project team James Wilson, Carey Lyon, Sam Hunter, Paul Dash, Tess O'Meara, Amanda Beh, Alex McCabe, Elliot Wong, Van Hoang, Nigel Bertram, Marika Neustupny, Nina Tory-Henderson, Jonathon Yeo, Rosanna Blacket, Simon Robinson, Julie Eizenberg, Nathan Bishop, Lily McBride-Stephens, Mark Langrehr, Belinda Lee, John Delaney, Jefa Greenaway, Albert Mo, Eid Go, Thomas Davies, Kirsten Bauer, Tim Fowler, Warwick Savvas, Christian Riquelme, Dermot Egan, Mark Gillingham, Phil Harkin; Builder Kane Constructions; Project manager DCWC; Quantity surveyor Slattery Australia; Cultural consultant Greenshoot Consulting, Jefa Greenaway; Structural and civil engineer WSP; Facade engineer Alto BMG; ESD Aurecon; Services engineer Lucid Consulting Australia; Fire engineer Dobbs Doherty; Traffic engineer GTA; Acoustic engineer Marshall Day; Building surveyor and access consultant McKenzie Group; Theatre planning Schuler Shook; AV consultant UT Consulting (formerly CHW Consulting); Wayfinding Aspect Studios; Sustainability strategy Breathe; Heritage Lovell Chen

---

(FOOTNOTES)

(1) *La Città ideale di Urbino* (circa 1480–1490) is one of three interpretations of the theme – the Urbino, Berlin and Baltimore versions, all of unknown authorship. Exercises in perspective and geometry, they are allegorical images for order and good government.

(2) Named after the education reformer and noted eugenicist.

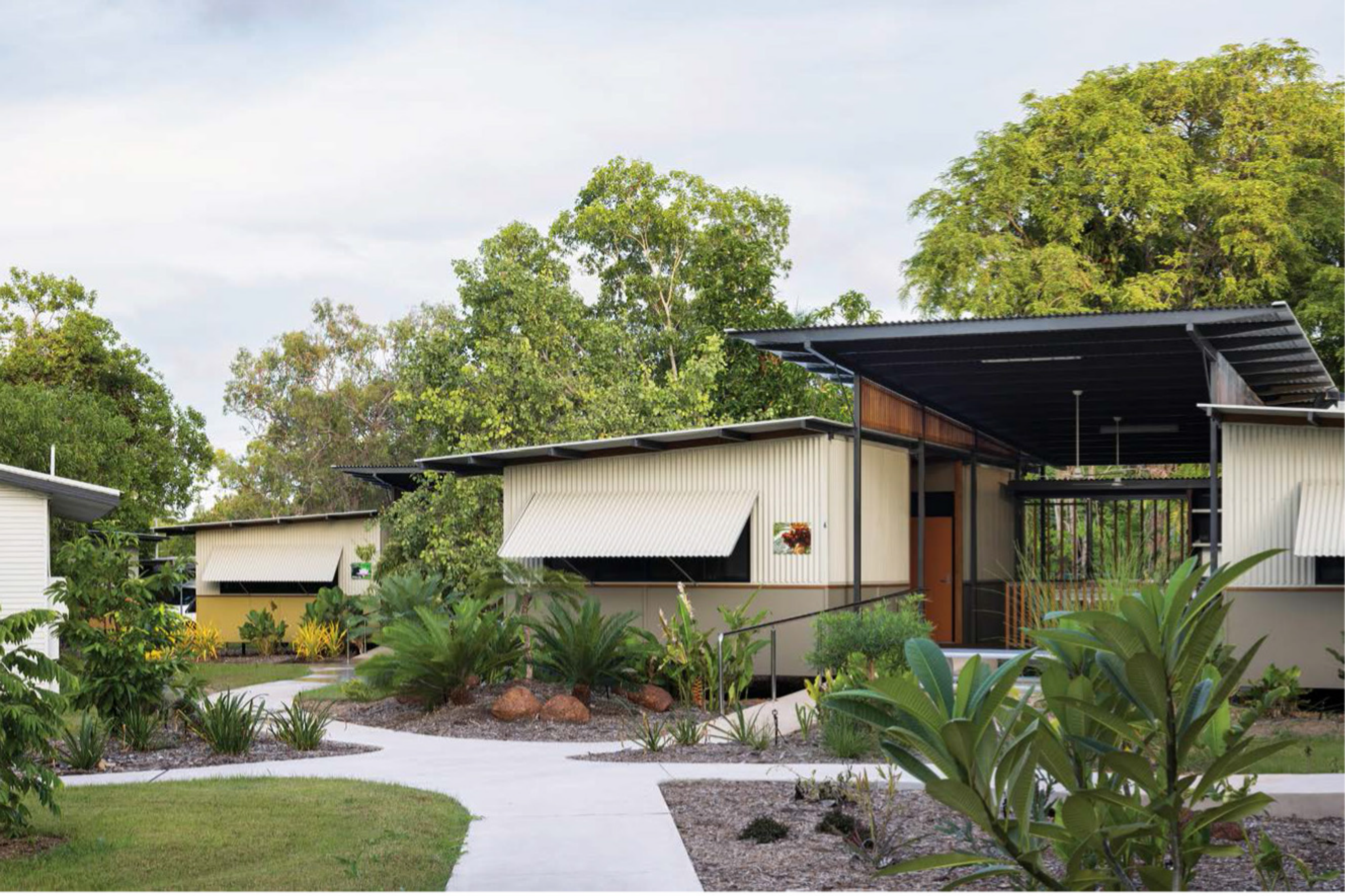
Nungalinya Student Accommodation

(COUNTRY) Larrakia
(REVIEWER) Susan Dugdale
(PHOTOGRAPHER) Clinton Weaver

Underpinned by a years-long relationship and a set of shared values, Incidental Architecture's work at Nungalinya uses robust materials to achieve a simple, practical elegance.

(ARCHITECT)

Incidental Architecture



(PREVIOUS) The new accommodation units provide a peaceful, safe environment for students within the busyness of Darwin.

(ABOVE) The new buildings reflect the architect's thorough understanding of the basic principles of tropical architecture.

(OPPOSITE) The programming and layout are based around physical and cultural safety for the students.

Over a number of years, Sydney-based practice Incidental Architecture has forged an ongoing relationship with Nungalinya College in Darwin. Nungalinya is a tri-partisan Christian college (Catholic, Anglican and Uniting churches) teaching languages and leadership to First Nations students from across Australia. The students are mostly female, mostly mature age, and typically arrive from busy communities and lives with heavy commitments. They need a calm environment where they can focus on their studies, be supported and feel safe in the urban context of Darwin.

Incidental Architecture principal Matt Elkan visited Nungalinya with World Vision in 2011 and an initial relationship was forged. In the years that followed, Incidental Architecture practice members were part of a church group from New South Wales that returned to the college annually to provide practical, on-the-ground support with tasks such as gardening and painting. With architectural skills on hand, this support developed into the design and documentation of five group-accommodation units for students, in a staged construction process.

The Nungalinya campus occupies a large, park-like site near Darwin's busy Casuarina Square shopping centre; it feels simultaneously abundant and "bare-bones." Simple, aged buildings nestle into verdant tropical vegetation. It speaks of a well-established organization with minimal resourcing but a strong sense of purpose. Incidental Architecture is committed to providing pro bono services but is necessarily selective about which projects it takes on. Nungalinya's overall aim – for its students "to grow their skills and knowledge in a nurturing environment" – matches the practice's own values.

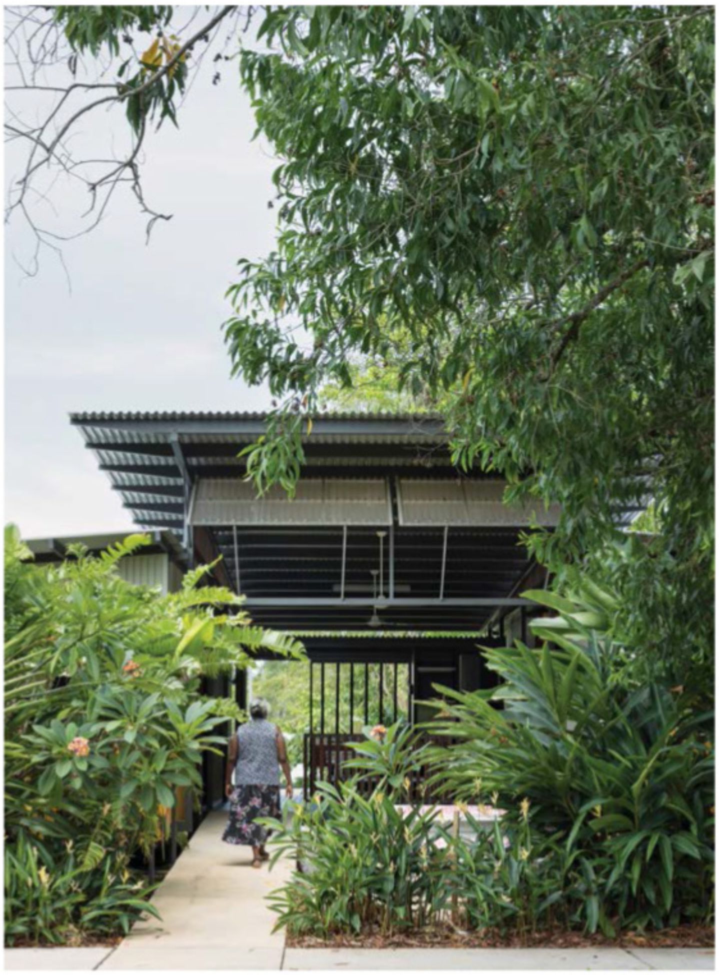
The new student-accommodation units use the tropical language of wide eaves, exposed structure, robust materials, breezeways, and so on, that we are accustomed to seeing in designs by Troppo and other Top End architects. However, it is clear that Incidental Architecture's design has been developed from the same first principles as these other projects, rather than being derivative of a particular style – the layout of the units responds to prevailing breezes, the roofs can cope with intense tropical rainfall events, and materials have been selected to be robust, economical and low-maintenance. This ready understanding of a tropical climate can be attributed to Elkan's childhood, spent in Papua New Guinea, and his extensive travels through remote and tropical Australia.

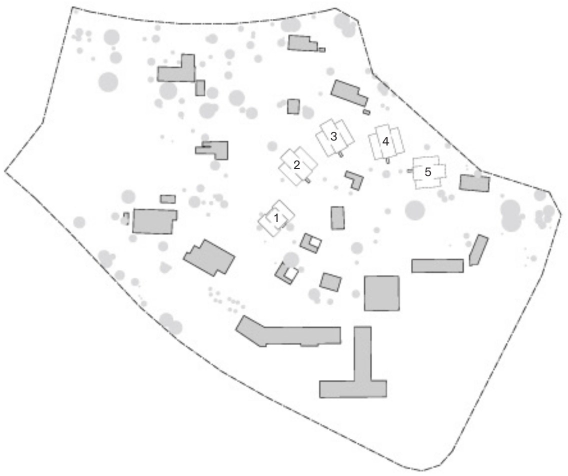
The five units have been built sequentially: the first unit was completed in late 2018, the second two years later, and the other three about a year after that. Further work is planned, as funds become available. This slower pace and staged process has allowed time for the mainly Aboriginal board of Nungalinya to evolve their brief, for trust to develop between client and architect, and for the students to give feedback on their experience. For example, the newer units eschew the indented nooks that captured the airconditioner condensers in the first model as too fiddly and not cost-effective. Privacy of entries to bedrooms has been increased and the rooms enlarged. Further lessons, for the next iteration, are already collated in the mind of property manager Mal, who showed me through the site. These include less external timber requiring maintenance and wider concrete paths through the campus for cleaners' trolleys.

The practical simplicity of the completed buildings produces a pleasing elegance. The fine edges of the unlined eaves and the simple timber balustrading frame the central, open breezeway. As the main living area for the students in each accommodation unit, this breezeway is oriented to the prevailing wind, elevated, ventilated with ceiling fans and fully shaded to provide a habitable outdoor space and to limit the use of airconditioners to the bedrooms. In the bathrooms, the stainless-steel joinery sits well with mushroom grey tiling and coved vinyl flooring in gunmetal grey.

The symmetrical, rectilinear layout of the spaces is efficient, economical and clearly legible to the first-time user. Ramps to the raised floor level provide enhanced access for varied user mobility. Physical and cultural safety for the students has been a strong design determinant in the programming and layout. Each accommodation unit houses 10 students in four two- or three-person bedrooms, offering multiple options for grouping and separation without being prescriptive. The breezeway provides communal space with a strong connection to the tropical gardens, and an opportunity for passive surveillance.

At Nungalinya, Incidental Architecture is venturing into the realm of non-Indigenous architects working for First Nations clients, where architectural services are provided under the spectre of a colonial paradigm, in a space that is still a frontier – with a need to forge new roles and philosophies. The practice has operated well in this space, building trust with Nungalinya through the provision of sensitive, practical design following direct and ongoing consultation. The staged, iterative process has equipped the college with the skills to develop its own brief and to be an effective client on both this project and future campus infrastructure.

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Site plan
1:4000

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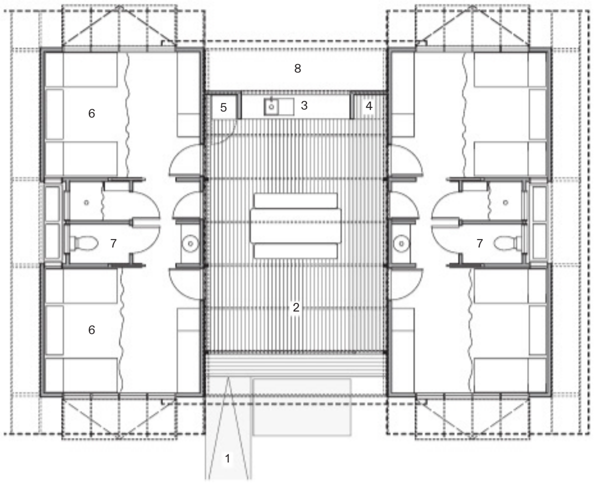
N

(SITE PLAN KEY)

1 Unit 1 “Flame tree”
2 Unit 2 “Kapok”
3 Unit 3 “Water lily”
4 Unit 4 “Cycad”
5 Unit 5 “Frangipani”

(FLOOR PLAN KEY)

1 Entry/access ramp
2 Breezeway
3 Wash bench
4 Storage
5 Fridge
6 Bedroom
7 Ensuite
8 External laundry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First unit floor plan
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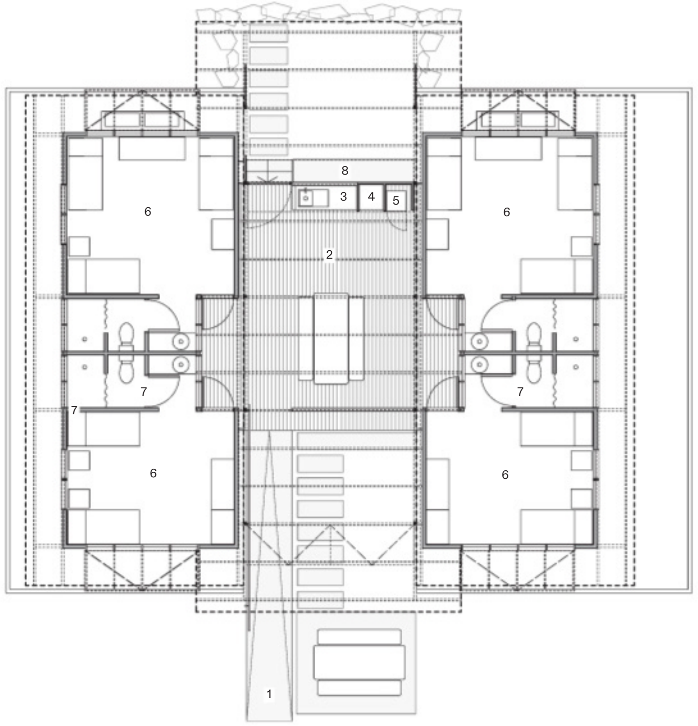
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Subsequent unit floor plan
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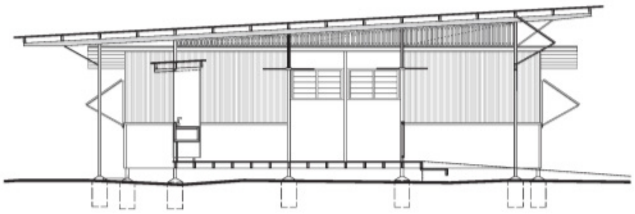

Longitudinal section
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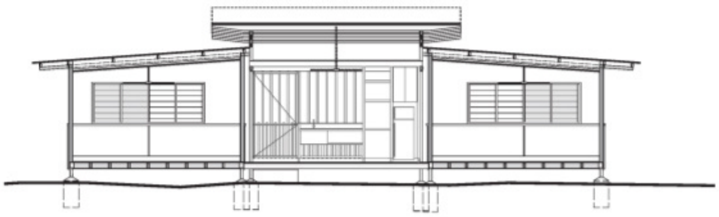

Cross section
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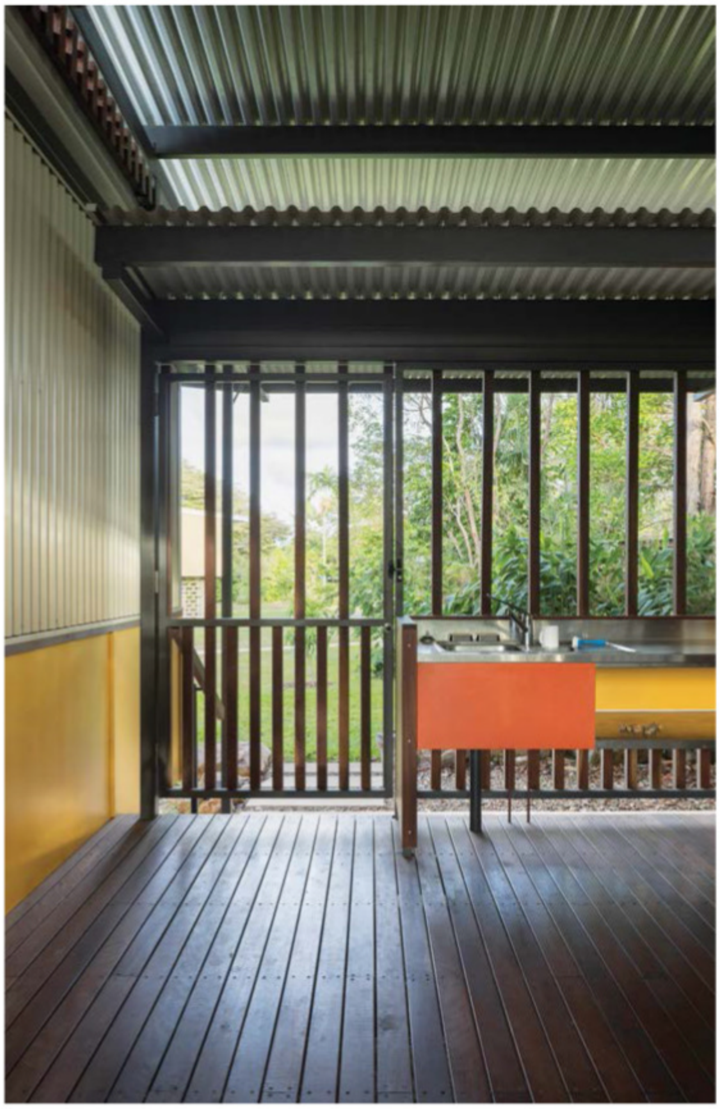
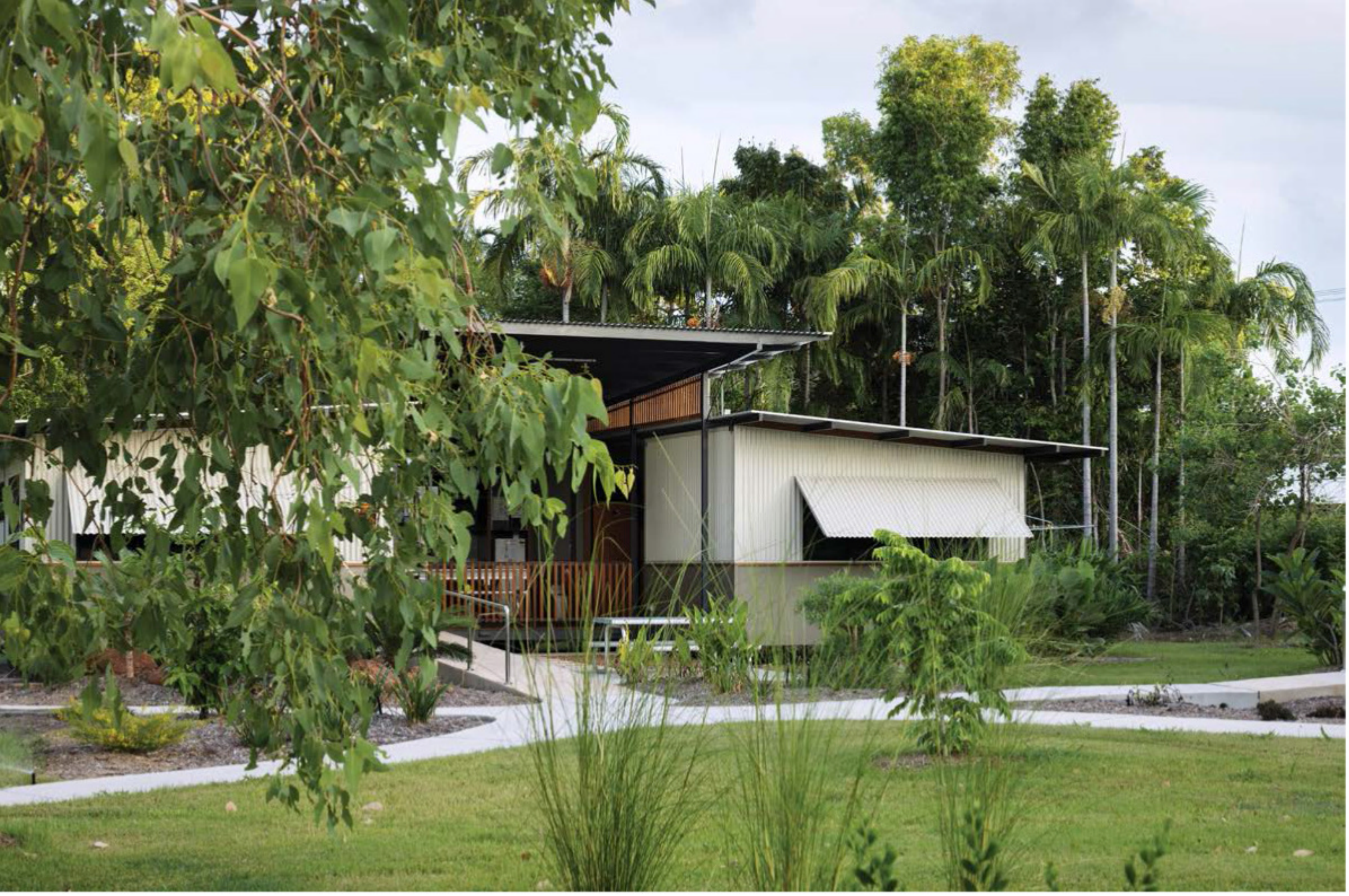


(ABOVE LEFT) The orientation of the central breezeway reduces the need for airconditioners.

(ABOVE RIGHT) Timber balustrading and unlined eaves lend the communal area a simple elegance.



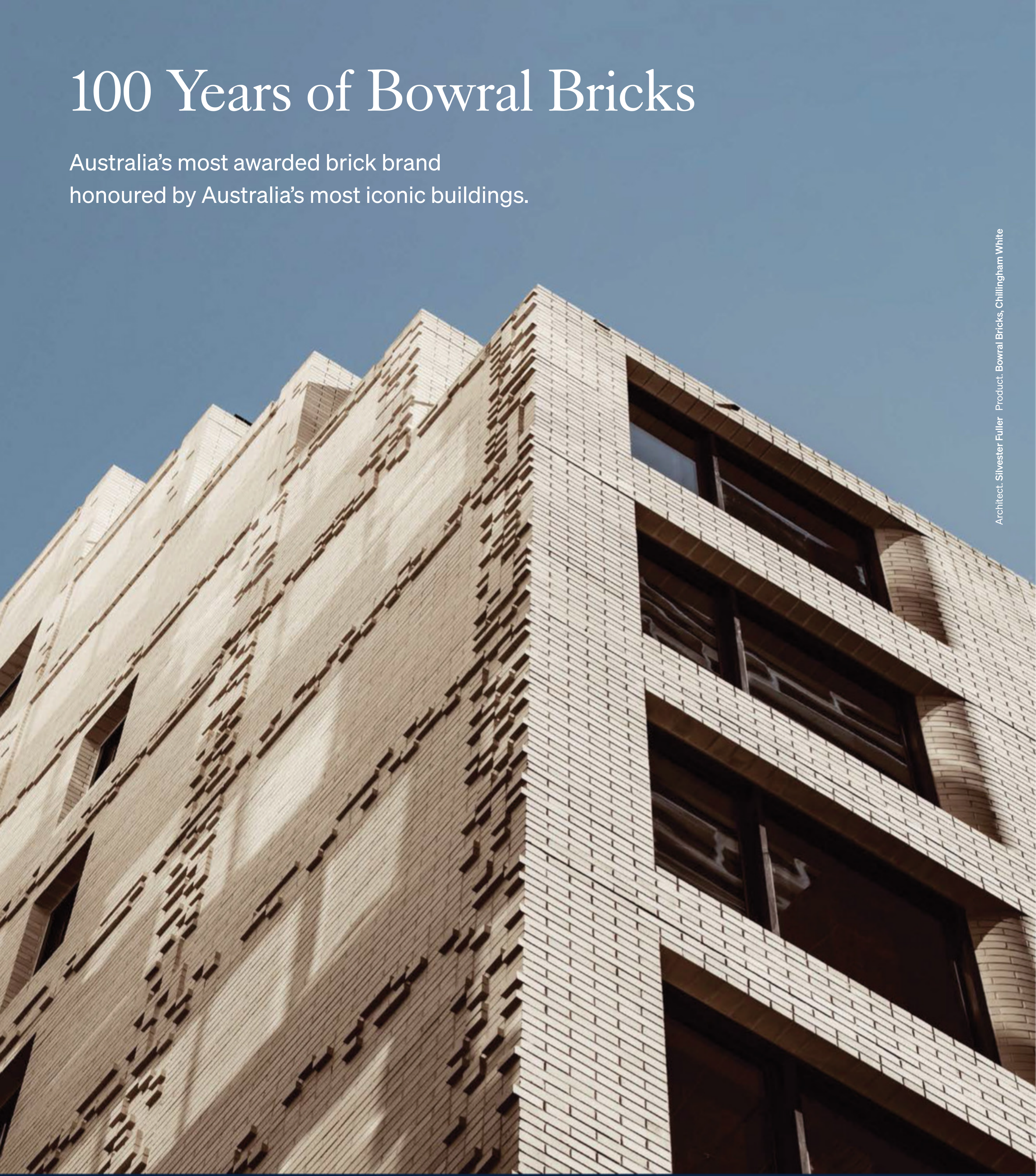
Nungalinya's principal, Ben van Gelderen, emphasizes that the new work has changed the college's whole outlook. The students, who typically come from crowded, dilapidated housing in remote communities, love the accommodation and feel honoured by the quality of the environment. In turn, Elkan comments that through their work at the college and the relationships developed, Incidental Architecture team members have gained a great deal.

This project tests the unique philosophy and perspective that Incidental Architecture espouses: that buildings are "incidental to life." A dictionary definition tells us that "incidental" means "happening as a minor accompaniment to something else." I would argue that Incidental Architecture is underplaying the success of this project and the positive influence it is having on the lives of Nungalinya's students. The practice has created a beautiful and calming environment, where the simplicity, finely tuned functionality and elegance of the structures speak to a bigger story about people and their care for each other. Its work at Nungalinya, undertaken over an extended period, underscores the view that architectural projects are, first and foremost, about relationships.

— Susan Dugdale is director of Susan Dugdale and Associates, an Alice Springs-based practice that provides architectural services on urban and remote projects for a wide range of clients, including many First Nations clients.

(ABOVE) The units have been built in a staged process to manage funding and implement the students' feedback.

Architect Incidental Architecture; Project team (this project) Daina Cunningham, Matt Elkan; Project team (ongoing work) Hayley Skelton, Pearce Cohen, Daina Cunningham, Matt Elkan; Builder C and R Constructions; Structural engineer WGA



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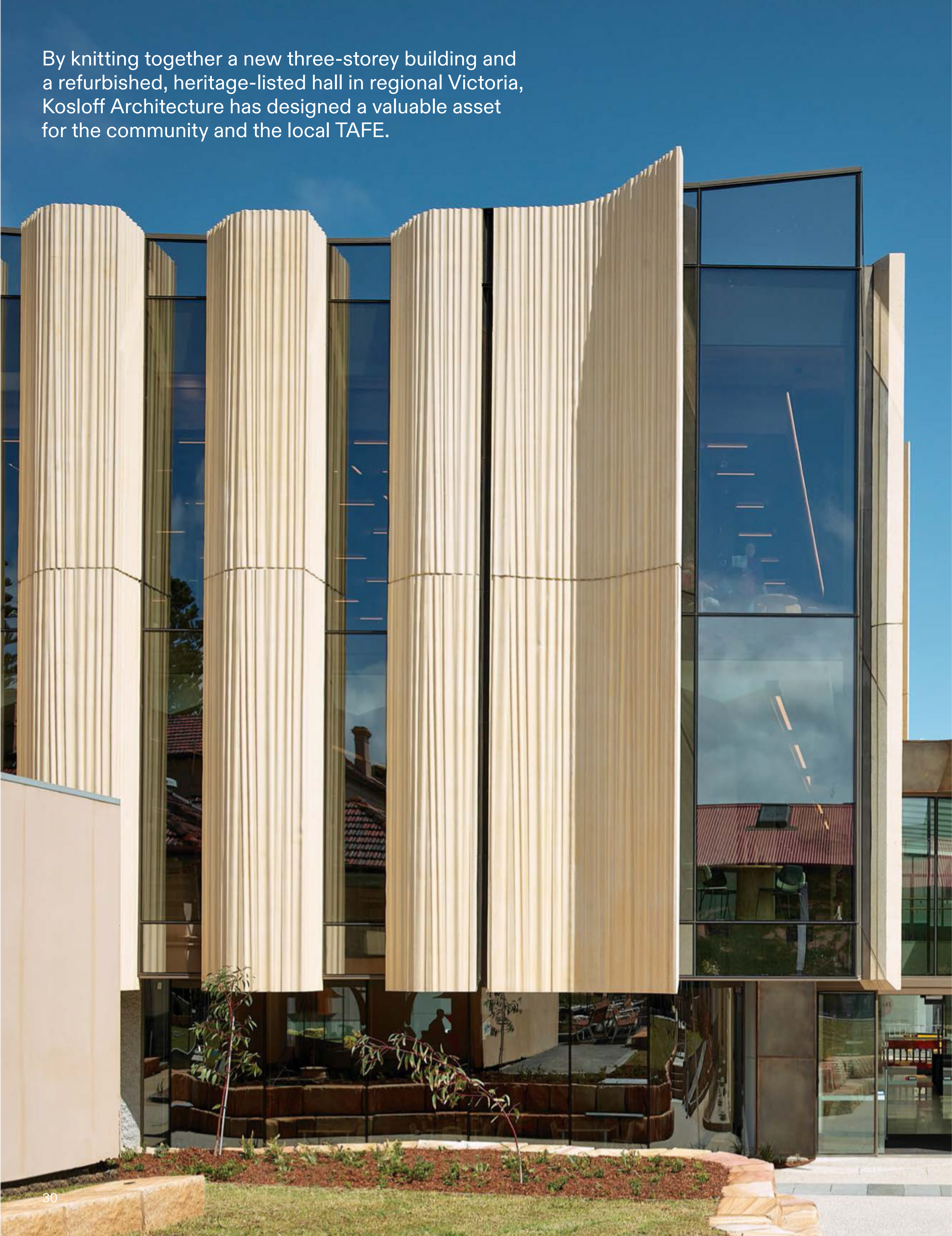
By knitting together a new three-storey building and a refurbished, heritage-listed hall in regional Victoria, Kosloff Architecture has designed a valuable asset for the community and the local TAFE.

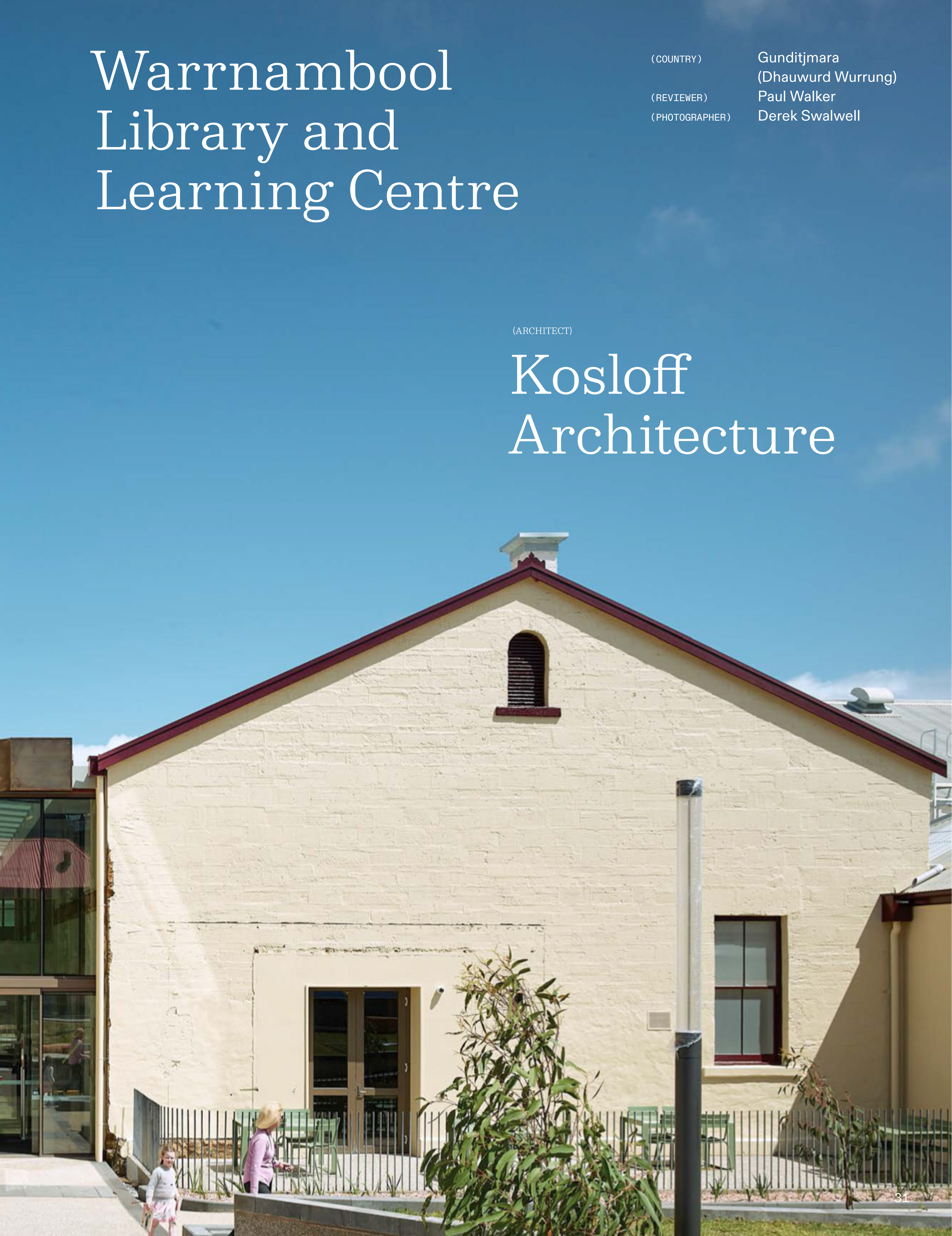


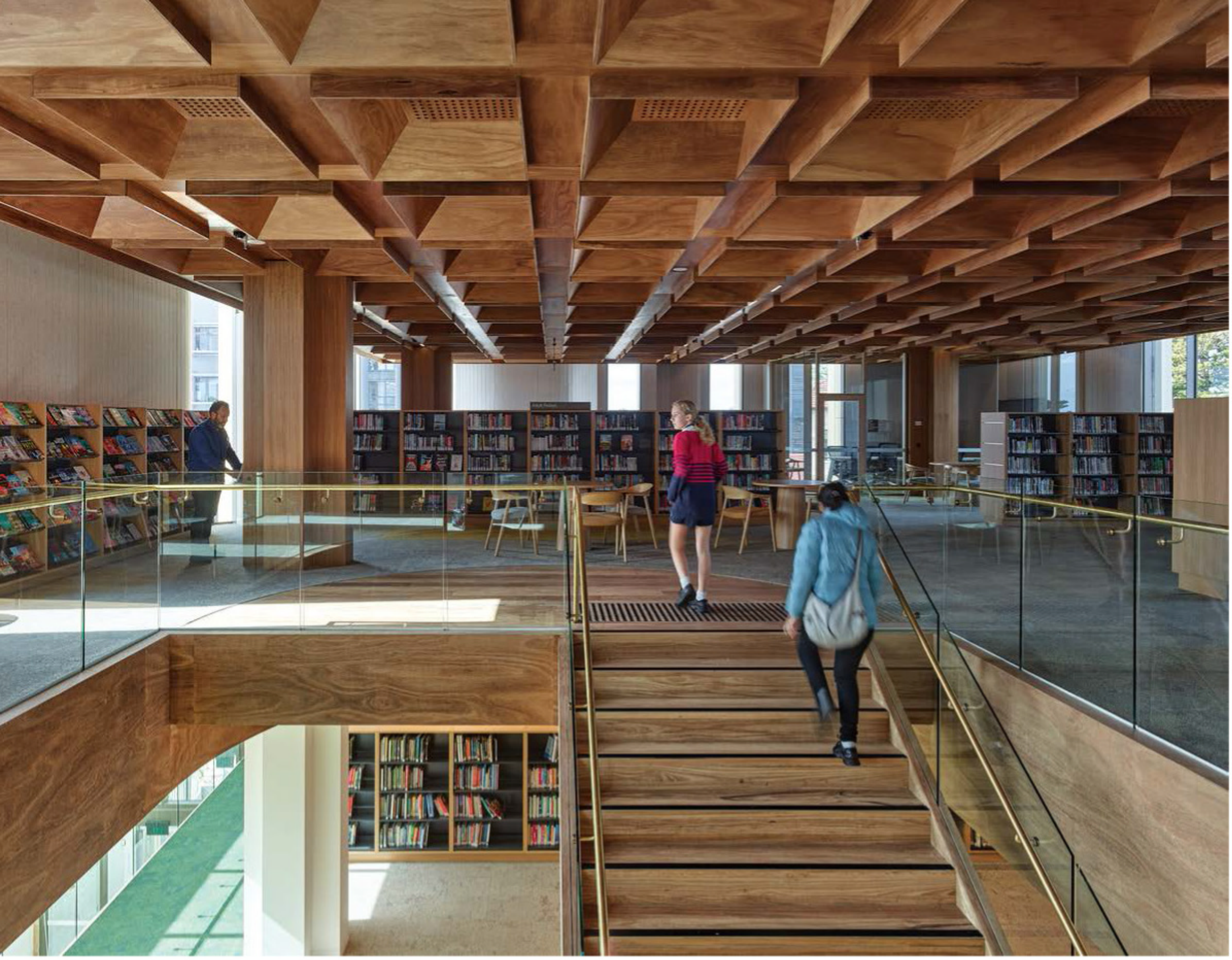
Warrnambool Library and Learning Centre

(COUNTRY) Gunditjmara (Dhauwurd Wurrung)
(REVIEWER) Paul Walker
(PHOTOGRAPHER) Derek Swalwell

(ARCHITECT)

Kosloff Architecture





A carefully modulated new building is knitted together with a group of mostly modest heritage structures. The context is the small campus of a TAFE in a regional Victorian city. The brief entailed the integration of a public library and the TAFE's "learning hub." Altogether, this sounds constrained though worthy. But despite the constraints – perhaps because of them – Kosloff Architecture has created a complex and interesting project.

The main public street access to the library is through the classical pedimented front of what was an old hall with a history of various uses, including as a library. A smaller pediment supported by double columns on either side marks the doorway. It's stripped back and spare, and now modestly wears its classical detailing behind a layer of off-white paint. Inside, the panelled, coved ceiling is also abstracted with white paint, but the walls have distressed remnants of the original decorative scheme with Ionic not-quite pilasters along the sides. This hall is spacious and sparely furnished with comfortable seating, shelves for large-print books, catalogue stations and the library help desk. Three large, hanging light fittings, each in the form of a cross, are the immediately obvious nod to newness and draw attention upward. To the north – housed behind much more modest facades – are an office for apprenticeship support and a quiet reading room with adjacent meeting spaces. In the reading room, the timber trusses of the old roof structure are exposed, and the new ceiling surfaces above are metal – white delineated with black lines, somewhat rehearsing the appearance of timber boards. Ceilings turn out to be a thing at the Warrnambool Library and Learning Centre.

Back to the main hall. At the east end – where in some of the hall's previous incarnations there was a stage – the new has taken

over. The dominant feature here is a stack of stepped timber platforms ("study stage"), with a "grand stair" at one side in line with the centre axis of the hall space. The platforms stare back into the hall, a reverse audience. A large opening cut through the coved edge of the ceiling accommodates this stack and its stair, the incision emphasizing their newness. The stair takes us out of the hall and through the upper level of another old structure, with asymmetrical timber trusses supporting its roof (no fancy ceilings here), and then across a bridge over a top-glazed void into the main new building. Beneath this bridge at ground level, opening into the void and occupying adjacent found spaces, is a cafe. Other entries to the library, directly into the double-height void, are at either end.

The new building has three levels. The ground floor is for children, with an area for groups and structured activities at the north, and for individual reading and play at the south. The surfaces here are predominantly timber: columns (cross-form in plan), ceilings and floors (where not carpeted) are all wood. Most of the ceiling is clad in hardwood timber rods arranged in sections to form shallow extruded vaults, with all the service necessaries (lights and so forth) detailed to fit. On level one – where the "feature stair" from the old hall had landed us, but which is also served by an open stair entirely within the new building – the range of finishes is different. While this second stair continues on its woody way, walls and ceiling are white. The ceiling here is folded white perforated surfaces, again organized in linear extrusions. This level has shelves for nonfiction. The periphery of the public space has desks, low tables and seating (both loose chairs and fixed seating in nooks created by the varied plan profile of the solid wall elements). This pattern is repeated on level two, which is devoted to fiction. But here, the timber cladding of the cross-form columns returns, and there is another complex ceiling design, this time of timber coffers, with the lighting and other services again beautifully integrated. On this level, a seating area at the south-east corner has views of Warrnambool's coastline in the distance.

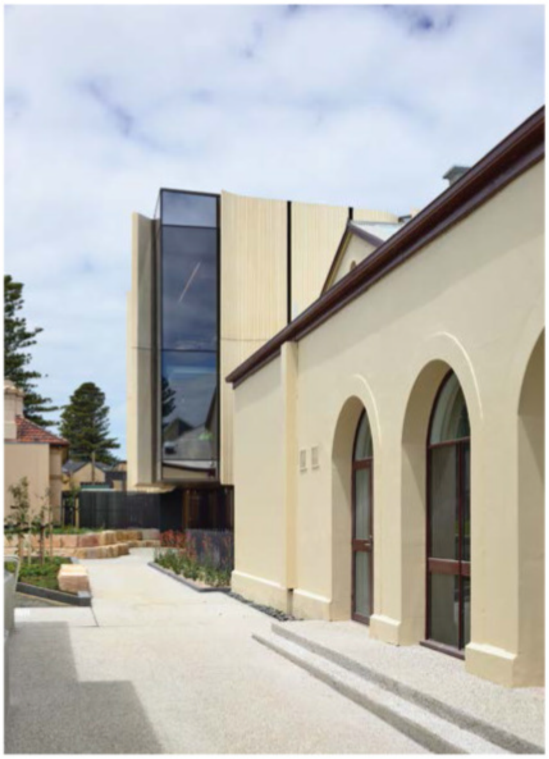
I like the new building, as indeed I like the whole complex of new elements and old. The place is carefully detailed and spatially generous. The congeries works. But I do not understand why there are three such different ceiling treatments in the new, or why the timber finishes of the ground and second floors give way to white on the first. The architect's reflected ceiling plans include an image of the ceiling of the old hall, solving the "where" of these ceiling designs but not the "why." Other things that might have been used to differentiate the library ambience on the three levels according to their focus on children, nonfiction and fiction – such as carpets or furniture – are less distinct. I am puzzled by this. The building is a public facility worthy of a great deal of architectural care and a sense of calm, and these the design achieves magnificently. But why all that energy devoted to different ceiling treatments? Did the architects overdo it, expecting them to be value-managed out? The differences are distracting, as if there is some minor but continuous disturbance at the periphery of one's vision. But maybe this only worries someone for whom architecture is foreground.

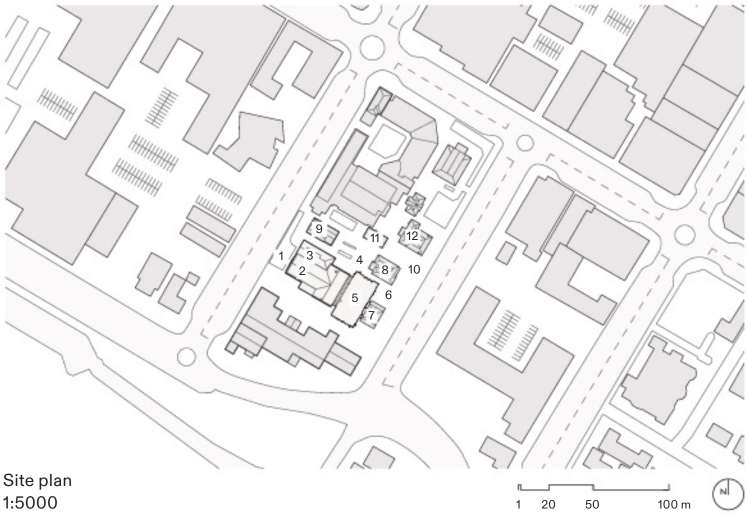
At ground level in the new building, the external walls to the north and east are entirely glazed, shaded by overhangs and allowing a view of the conserved historic customs house. To the south, the ground-floor walls are solid, corresponding to service areas in the building. Belying the internal differences, the exterior of the new building at its upper levels is a composition of vertical areas of glazing alternating with solid panels that span the floors, rising to a parapet subtly profiled upward toward the corners. The concrete cladding panels are cast with vertical impressions somewhat like gathered curtains, which flare out or fold in at their vertical edges, offering shade to the adjacent glass – skilful and visually rewarding. The new building has no street boundary, and perhaps the visually dominant vertical concrete panels and glazing were used to give the volume some visual presence and overcome the incoherence of its surroundings. This it does. To the south of the library site are service vehicle access ways; to the east, the stone customs house (domestic in scale); and to the north, a library forecourt, subtly landscaped into a series of spaces between the TAFE buildings.

Warrnambool's Library and Learning Centre is a success, integrating old and new works without trying to "disappear" the new. If sometimes there is too much going on design-wise, this is a better, more generous fault than not enough. Moreover, there is a spaciousness about the place befitting a library's dignity and making it a comfortable, humane environment. More places like this, please.

— Paul Walker is a professor of architecture at the University of Melbourne.

(PREVIOUS)	Warrnambool Library and Learning Centre is a joint project of the state government, South West TAFE and the city council.
(OPPOSITE ABOVE)	Timber is extensively used throughout the project, including in the ceilings, where services are carefully detailed to fit a vaulted design.
(OPPOSITE BELOW)	A combination of vertical concrete panels and glazing lends the new building, which has no street boundary, a distinct visual presence.
(RIGHT)	With the existing heritage-listed building stripped back and painted, the old and the new complement one another.





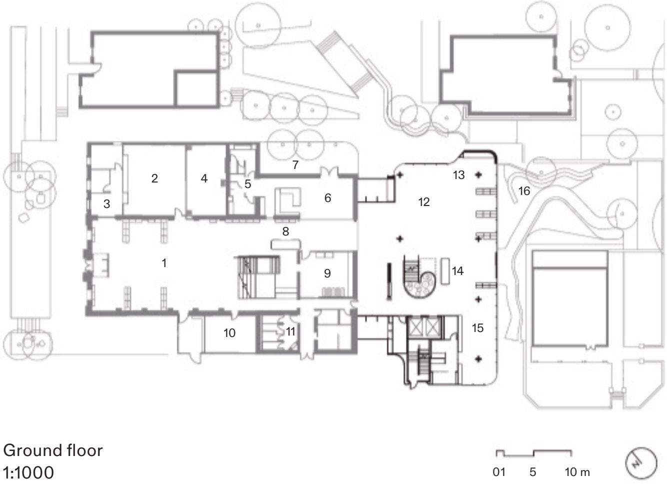
Site plan
1:5000

(OPPOSITE ABOVE) The use of light – to connect with the outdoors and to measure the passing of time – is a key component of the design.

(OPPOSITE BELOW) The new library space, which includes meeting rooms and study areas, is more than four times the size of the previous library.

(SITE PLAN KEY)

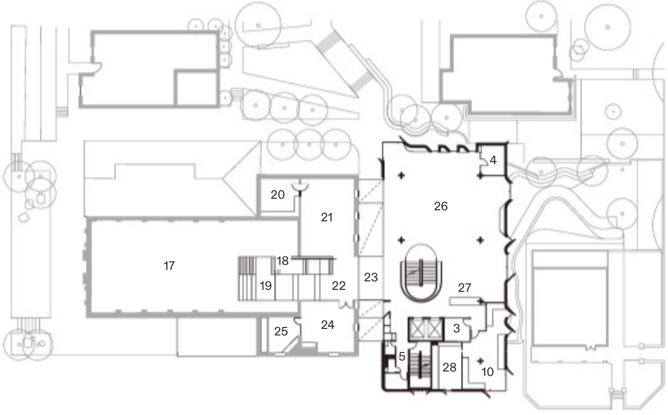
1	Kepler Street entrance
2	Orderly room
3	Gun room
4	Northern entry
5	Library and learning hub
6	Children's garden
7	Customs house
8	Police residence
9	Orderly room residence
10	Entry forecourt
11	Police stables
12	Police station



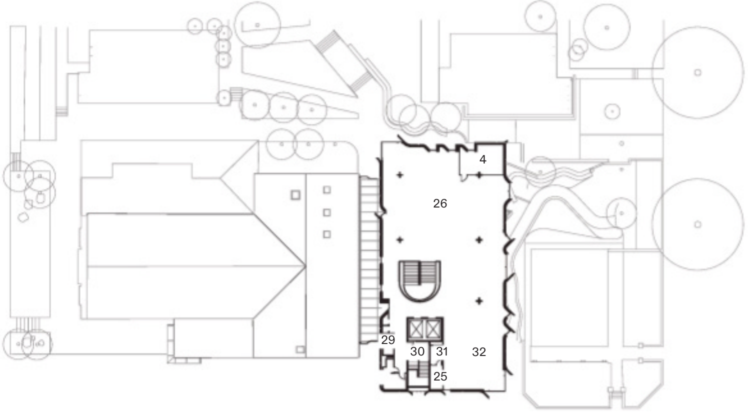
Ground floor
1:1000

(FLOOR PLAN KEY)

1	Orderly room collection
2	Reading room
3	Office
4	Meeting room
5	Amenities
6	Cafe
7	Outdoor cafe
8	Service desk
9	Sorting room
10	Staff work
11	Staff amenities
12	Junior years collection
13	Shared children's area
14	Reception
15	Early years collection
16	Children's garden
17	Orderly room
18	Grand stair
19	Study stage
20	Sound booth
21	Youth zone
22	Flexible space
23	Linkway
24	Tech zone
25	Store
26	Collection
27	Staff counter
28	Staff kitchen
29	Amenities corridor
30	Fire stair
31	Cleaners
32	Reading lounge



First floor
1:1000



Second floor
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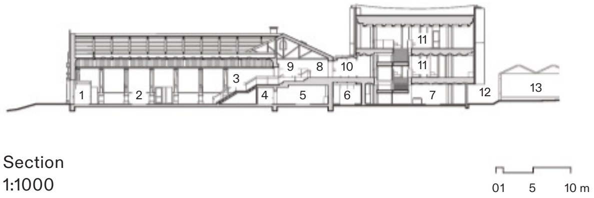
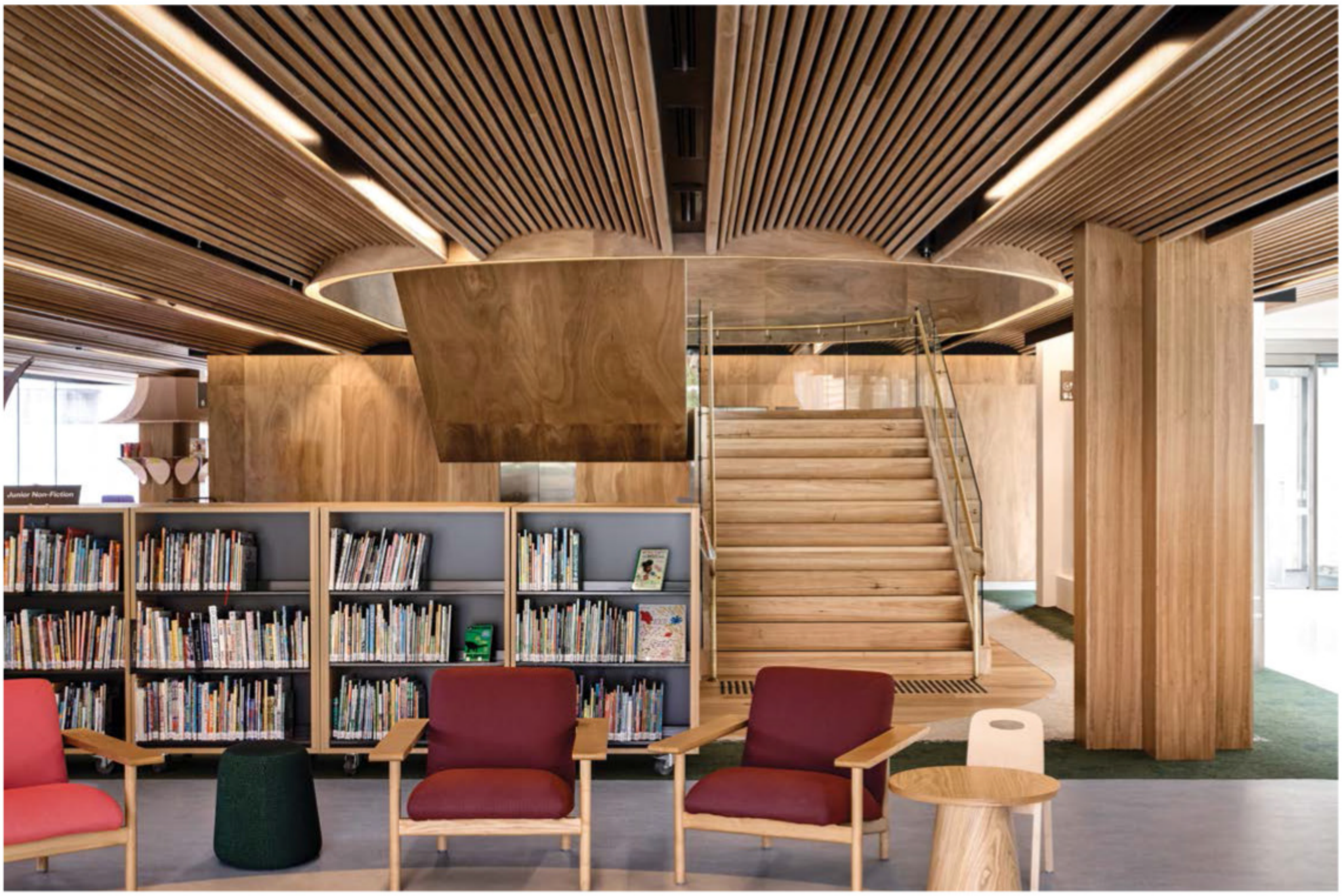
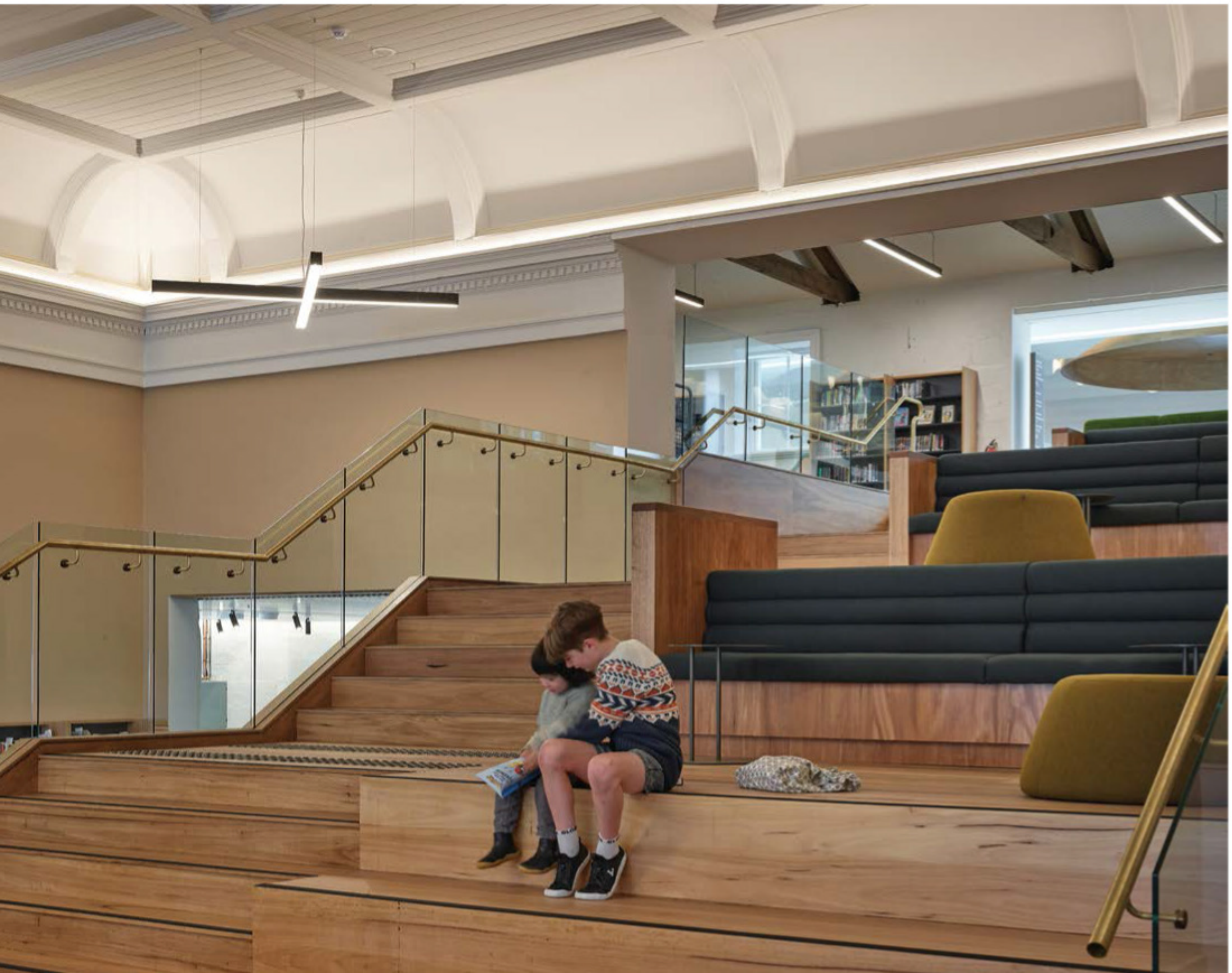


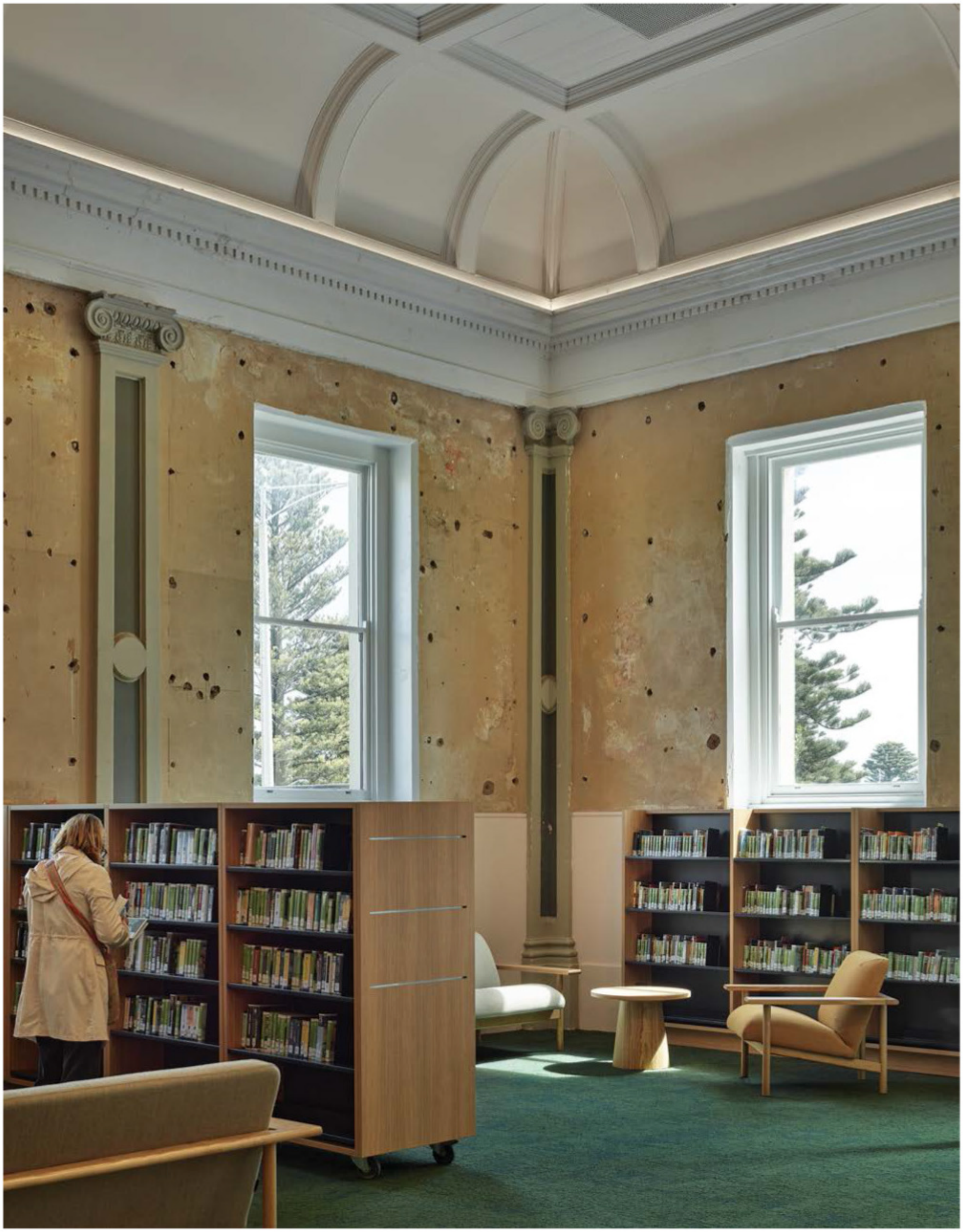
Section
1:1000

(SECTION KEY)

1	Western entrance
2	Orderly room collection
3	Grand stair
4	Staff administration
5	Sorting room
6	Northern entrance and linkway
7	Early years collection
8	Flexible space
9	Youth zone
10	Linkway
11	Collection
12	Children's garden
13	Old customs house


Junior Non-Fiction





(OPPOSITE ABOVE) The transition between old and new buildings is skilfully handled, with a top-glazed void linking the two.

(OPPOSITE BELOW) A "grand stair" and study stage now dominate the heritage hall space.

(ABOVE) On the interior walls of the old hall, distressed remnants of the original decorative scheme have been retained.

Architect Kosloff Architecture; Project manager TSA Management; Quantity surveyor Zinc Cost Management; Structural engineer Matter Consulting; Services engineer Wrap Engineering; Facade engineer Inhabit Group; ESD engineer Integral Group; Landscape architect Glas Landscape Architects; Building surveyor, access consultant Philip Chun; Acoustic engineer Resonate; Heritage consultant Bryce Raworth; Wayfinding consultant Studio Semaphore; Traffic consultant Quantum Traffic; Cultural consultant Conservation Studio

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(DISCUSSION)

Practising ngara in urban Country

(WRITERS) Maddison Miller and Matt Novacevski
(PHOTOGRAPHER) Maddison Miller

Maddison Miller and Matt Novacevski take us on a walk through Melbourne's Docklands, on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, to explore what might happen if we engage with Country as a living entity, even in the built-up heart of the city.

Being present in a place requires a stillness that feels like a luxury in our busy lives. It requires us to enact deep listening, to practise ngara – to listen, to think, to feel. In that listening, we can find Country, even in the deeply urban spaces. In these times of biodiversity collapse, climate emergency and ecological injustice inflicted by settler-colonialism, never has the invitation to ngara been more important for humans – particularly architects, designers and planners.

We, the authors, contemplate what urban Country means during a walk in Melbourne's Docklands – a tower-filled, post-industrial, urban renewal precinct that began as a hallmark of neoliberal planning in the mid-1990s. We meet at the end of a tram line, beneath the eight-lane Bolte Bridge in a park named after an Aussie Rules football champion that provides much-needed public space in an area where such indulgences still seem an afterthought. Sitting on a bench at the entrance to the park, we observe the entwining of the environs around us and our own being in place, recording our yarns. We write and reflect as accountable guests on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, as a Dharug person of shared Indigenous and colonial descent, and a second-generation settler of mixed continental European heritage. What unfolds from here is the intermingling of ideas that generates shared insights in a dialogue with place.

We have travelled here through the hardscape of Docklands where, amid the concrete and chrome, the only clues of nearby water are the apparently incongruous rows of cycads. As you approach the park, the cycads give way to a rain garden that appears as a rupture of life in the middle of the road. As our ears adjust to the rumble of traffic from the tollway overhead, the territorial calls of the wattlebird begin to emerge. Ron Barassi Senior Park is small, consisting of an expanse of grass, a community pavilion and a playground, bordered by native plants. As we sit and observe from a nicely sited bench at the park's edge, the soccer pitch transforms into a hunting ground for djirri djirri (willy wagtail). A skirmish breaks out between djirri djirri and a wattlebird over the prime position on the flowering banksia. The breeze gently moves the casuarina lining the perimeter walk around the playing fields and playground. A textbook example of what contemporary urban design discourse would call "soft edges," it is inviting, even as it butts up against security fencing with signs reading "Do not enter."

As beautiful as it is in many ways, the park is a place wrought with tensions. This is the one place in our walks through Docklands where we could sit and feel the stillness, supported by the breeze flowing through the grasses and casuarina. And yet our eyes are drawn to the thrusting columns of the Bolte Bridge to the right, and the towers of Docklands to the left. As much as we love the planted edges of the park, the placement of the more-than-human at the periphery feels intentional in a way that is uncomfortable. We continue our walk – past the beautifully designed playground and lush, irrigated lawns toward the shadowy underbelly of the bridge. Ahead of us lies the place where the Moonee Ponds Creek meets the Birrarung (Yarra River). This sacred meeting of waters is now marked by concrete and stacked shipping containers that hint at the violence inflicted on these vital arteries.

(BELOW) As architects and designers, we are stewards of place, called to work with Country, to "bend to the will of the river, rather than bend the river to our will."

(NEXT) In the park, we have invited some nature back into the landscape – but even here, on what was once a wetland, Water Country remained relegated.

Another tension unfurls. “I guess, the beauty and the disappointment that I feel in this site is that yes, we’ve opened an invitation to nature and nature has accepted; however, we can also see what parts of nature we didn’t invite into this space – Water Country.” In this, the driest continent on earth, it seems we continue to take water for granted. On the edge of the languid creek, it takes a concerted effort to hear life, but once you tune in, twittering families of superb fairywrens can be heard in the pockets of protective shrubs. We stand for a long time by the water’s edge.

Waterways form important traversal routes through Country, providing rich nutrients and healing resources. This land once thrummed with vibrant life, until it was stolen, filled and exploited. Today, we view the many waterways of urban Country as polluted, tainted. Upstream from where we stand, significant work has been done to remove kilometres of concrete from the Moonee Ponds Creek, allowing the water to seep back into the earth once more, nourishing Country. Nevertheless, we largely continue to turn our back on waterways, as though we’re unable to face or reckon with the violence done unto them. Here, near where we are standing, life-filled wetlands have been filled and used as rubbish dumps.[1] Rivers have been dredged and diverted, with ecological and cultural impacts that we find difficult to fathom. Floodplains have been altered and flooding has ensued. Where we stand, the results manifest in the green slime along the rocks on the water’s edge near the creek mouth. We notice the rubbish, the turbidity and the stagnant feel of what should be a life-filled meeting of waters. And that’s what we can see and sense in just this moment. Apart from this one section of land where we can meet the creek, much of the surrounding waterfront is cut off by security fencing. What happens, we muse, when we really listen to the water as a living entity? We extend the provocation to placemakers to allow Country its agency, to let water travel and to resume its nourishing interplay with land, bringing life as it has done in this place since the Dreaming.

At the confluence of the Birrarung and the Moonee Ponds Creek, a set of concrete stairs leads us to the uninviting water’s edge. Surrounded by rubbish, a rakali scampers over the tumbled-stone embankment. We are excited at the presence of this ingenuous, adaptive mammal in this place of apparently little ecological value. It is evident that the water is constrained, unable to do what it wants to do – that is, to flow, to be funnelled to unseen places, sharing its bounty as it goes. As work illustrating aqua nullius from Virginia Marshall[2] and others shows, the theft and destruction of water is entwined with the destruction of land. In other words, our inability to face the water results in enduring harm to Country. We reflect on the role that water plays in keeping Country healthy by caring for what is downstream, and in providing food and shelter for plants and animals. Here where we sit, the needs of humans and economic productivity prevail, and the creek is denied its rights and its role in caring for Country.

Silent for a few moments, we wind our way back from the creek, past the asphalt carpark, to a quadrangle of lawn at the back of a pavilion. The only link to the water from this side of the park is a view through a barbed-wire-topped fence. A prominent tension in our conversation is the false duality between designing for people, or for nature. We both sense that this conversation is absurd, as we know people are nature. Taking the small cognitive step to understanding ourselves as nature, as Country, reveals that we have a custodial role within the urban ecosystem. Place calls us to this every day. And it is on us as architects, placemakers and designers to respond to this call to stewardship, starting by listening to what place is telling us as a precursor to working in partnership with what Country provides.

It’s a relief to walk back through the casuarina that fringe the path, to feel their wispy needles swaying in the breeze. The call of the wattlebird returns and we notice groundcover species spilling on to the path. The lines between the built and the natural blur, as they should. “This is obviously a manufactured and planned and planted environment, but still – you can’t plant wattlebirds, you have to invite them into this space.” With every decision, every action, we might ask ourselves who we are inviting to this place, and how. This invocation calls for listening, for awareness and for an understanding of how we can make space for the dances of wattlebirds and djirri djirri – and perhaps even species that are less resilient in the wake of urbanism. Or, how the decisions of design can foreclose the ability of Country to foster life – human and more-than-human.

Listening to Country means listening to the echoes of the past as well as to the promise of the future as it permeates the present. Even the slightest enquiry into a site reveals the symbiosis that defines Country, and how humans can open the way for this symbiosis to occur, so that Country may be healthy. Here in the park, we reflect on this area’s past as a wetland with large salt lakes and bountiful resources. In placemaking, we have the opportunity to connect deeply with stories of the past to bolster the health of the future. Can we bend to the will of the river, rather than bend the river to our will? As we experience increasingly extreme climate events, it is clear that respect for Country is paramount. We are not masters of the water, as the floods that have engulfed the nation recently have shown.

We are back where we started, with the wattlebirds and the djirri djirri playing out their daily routines. They are extending a call to us from their little pocket. We say Country speaks to us, but who is listening? Who is taking up the call to action – a call that reverberates through every design decision we make? How are the boundaries of humans, arbitrary and self-serving, inhibiting the rights of Country? As we leave the park, human sounds take over: laughter, the ding of the tram, the drone of the traffic. Concrete and glass crowd together and it becomes harder again to imagine the role of Country in the human-centered world; a sense of disconnectedness follows. We leave the now-empty park to the wattlebird and the last stretches of the creek to the rakali.

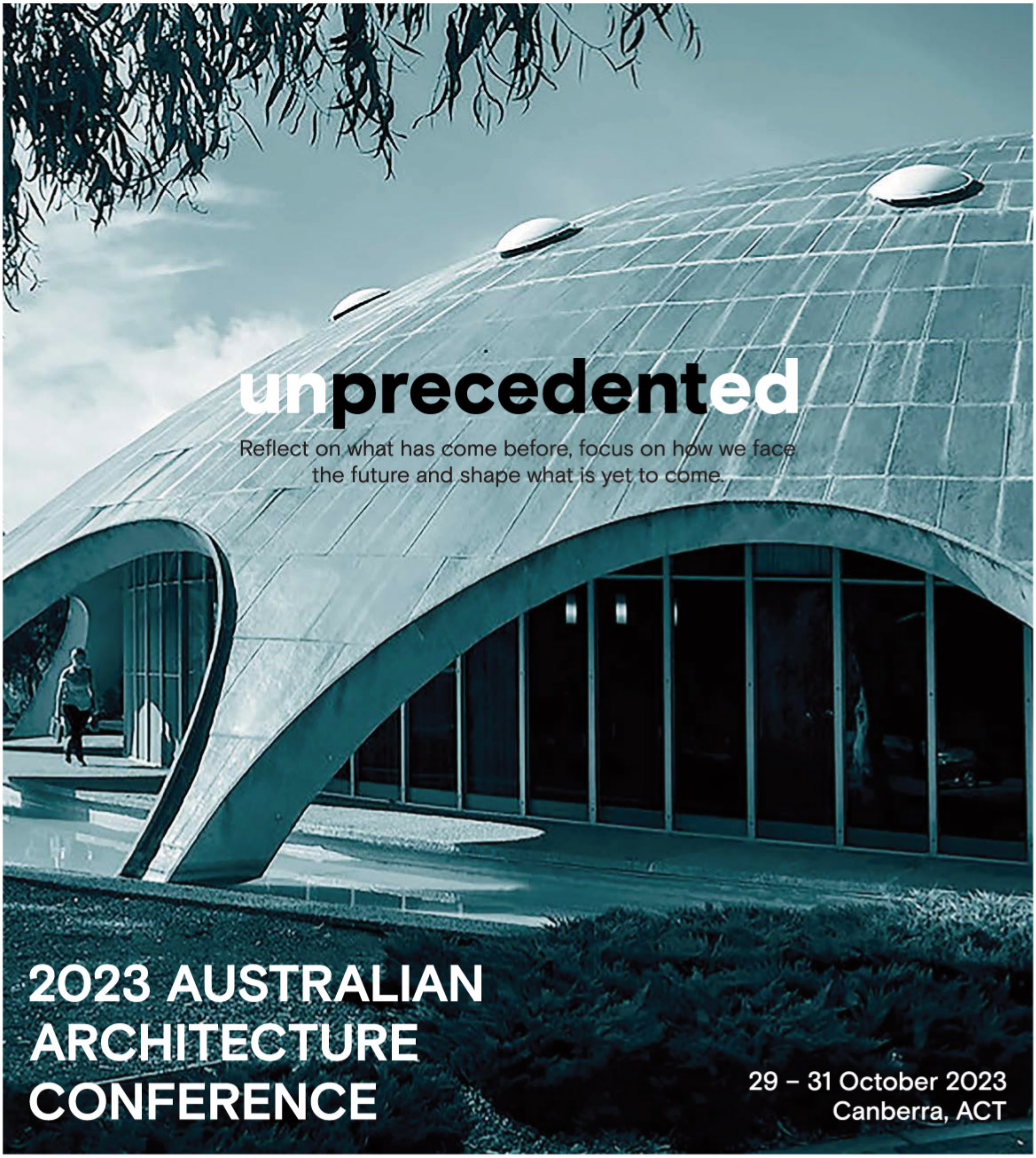
— Maddison Miller is a Dharug woman with a deep commitment to telling stories with Country. She is a researcher at the University of Melbourne looking at ways of knowing Country.

— Matt Novacevski is a planner, researcher and advocate for place. He is exploring postcolonial approaches to evaluating placemaking practice in his PhD research at the University of Melbourne.

(FOOTNOTES)

(1) David Sornig, *Blue Lake: Finding Dudley Flats and the West Melbourne Swamp* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2018).

(2) Virginia Marshall, *Overturning Aqua Nullius: Securing Aboriginal Water Rights* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2017).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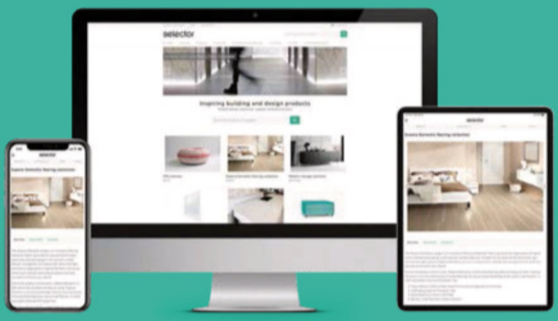

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(IN MEMORY)

Vale Peter Muller 3 July 1927 – 17 February 2023

(WRITER) Jan Golembiewski

Part of the Sydney School, Peter Muller transformed international luxury hotel design in the 1980s, integrating traditional forms and natural materials to devise a new modernist vernacular.

The train stopped on Peter Muller's farm. No platform, just a track to Glenrock, a Georgian mansion with fluted sandstone Doric columns that Muller started renovating in 1964. I was 14 and carried a roll of drawings to receive a few hours of his tutelage in the conventions of architecture and the complications of materiality, prevailing winds, the inheritance of the landscape and light.

That was 40 years ago. I disturbed Muller at work on an Oberoi hotel for Luxor. He had turned to hotel design after a stint as director of the National Capital Branch of the National Capital Development Commission, where he was responsible for commissioning Australia's new Parliament House in 1977. "I asked Bert Read to draw a hypothetical scheme for the New Parliament – I wanted to inspire the competitors. It wasn't an easy brief," he told me.

As a boy in Adelaide, Muller liked to ride home from high school through the luxurious grounds of St Peter's College. He decided to meet the principal and left with a scholarship to complete his schooling. From there, he went straight to the University of Adelaide and graduated with a bachelor of engineering along with a fellowship in architecture from the South Australian School of Mines and Industries. One of the first Australians to win a Fulbright Scholarship, he went on to the University of Pennsylvania to obtain a master's in architecture.

Muller returned to work with architects Fowell and Mansfield in Sydney, where he was approached by American businessman Bob Audette for a mansion on a site in Castlecrag. Audette had in mind an East Coast reflection of an English Renaissance Revival (itself a rediscovery of Ancient Roman and Greek forms) – a style not dissimilar to homes Muller himself would later own: Glenrock, Bronte House and Kookynie. But Muller gave Audette something entirely different, using an "organic" approach – a modern style pioneered by Frank Lloyd Wright where architecture unifies a site and draws out its natural features.

Audette's attachment to an American Colonial home turned to a preference for brick in place of stone, which displeased Muller. Nevertheless, the completed house was close to Muller's original design, accentuating the natural fall of the land with strong horizontal lines of timber, glass and masonry. The house was the first of several by Muller to accept and embrace Sydney's landscape.

To the organic approach, Muller added his own ideas and designed several houses. The most famous of these is the James-Bond-like 1955 Richardson House in Palm Beach. Other architects of the period included Bill Lucas, Bruce Rickard, Neville Gruzman, Adrian Snodgrass and Ken Woolley. Collectively, they were known as the Sydney School.

In 1963, Muller spent time travelling in Thailand, Vietnam and Japan, where he embraced Buddhism and developed a love for Asian architecture. Around the same time, Muller was approached by a group who were dismayed by the way Bali's International-style hotels turned their backs on local traditions, materials and skills. As an experiment, they commissioned Muller to incorporate traditional Balinese forms into a resort design. Muller combined his interests in organic and Asian architecture and philosophy to develop the Matahari Hotel plan – a series of thatched bungalows. In place of livestock and rice-paddies, the facility had all the amenities a jet-setting traveller would expect: AC, pools, shops, restaurants and cabanas by the beach.

The Matahari wasn't built, but Muller designed both his own house and the Kayu Aya Hotel in Bali to demonstrate the beauty of traditional Balinese forms, reframed with modern standards of comfort. Between Muller and the Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa, the "Bali style" was invented. Enjoyed by locals and international travellers alike, it gave designers permission to embrace the vernacular elsewhere – from Thailand to Tahiti.

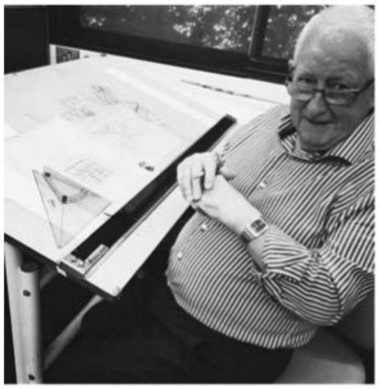
The Kayu Aya was bought by the Oberoi Group and Muller was commissioned to modify the hotel for the new owners and clientele. The travel industry was effusive, awarding the design prestigious awards, including the *Condé Nast Traveller*'s "Hot List," for decades to come. This led to an explosion of international luxury hotel design, and in the 1980s, Muller built the Amandari Hotel in Ubud, which synthesized all his work in Bali. Again, the hotel won a string of awards, twice being voted "Best Hotel in the World" by *The Gallivanter's Guide* (1995 and 1997). The power of Muller's design was best summed up by Giovannino Agnelli in *Travel and Leisure* magazine (March 1993): "When I die I no longer want to go to heaven ... I want a reservation at Amandari – if not for eternity, then for a week."

Muller was officially recognized as a "Modern Bali Undagi" (traditional Balinese architect) in Bali in 2010 and received an Order of Australia in recognition of his work in 2014. He died peacefully aged 95 with his son, Peter, daughter, Suzy, grandchildren and family friends nearby.

— Jan Golembiewski is a practising architect at Psychological Design, a specialist architectural firm working out of Sydney.

Vale Les Clarke 15 July 1936 – 24 January 2023

(WRITERS) Justin Littlefield and
Simon Le Nepveu



Beginning with Eltham College, which he founded in 1973, Les Clarke transformed school design in Australia, leading to policy change and significant new opportunities for schools and communities as well as architects.

Australian architecture has lost one of its quietly brilliant changemakers. Les Clarke was a born pioneer. He was also a skilled masterplanner, a thoughtful friend, an unconventional problem-solver, and an encouraging mentor. He gave hundreds of Australian designers their break and helped his practice weather several recessions through innovative thinking and openness to change. He knew a good idea when he had it or heard it, and he backed people to pursue theirs. If Clarke had a motto, it was, "Go for it."

Clarke co-founded Clarke Hopkins Clarke Architects in 1960 with fellow RMIT architecture graduates David Hopkins and Jack Clarke. In 1973, when he founded and designed Eltham College, "chalk and talk" still ruled in schools. Standardized facilities were built quickly using design templates. In Victoria, the Public Works Department allocated designs based on projected enrolments. Catholic schools were sharing facilities with their parishioners, but not the broader community. Wealthy independent schools were appointing architects to design performing arts centres and sports stadiums, but they were for school use only. Schools were narrowly defined places, largely vacant outside school hours.

Clarke changed all that. A young father living in Melbourne's north-eastern suburbs, he went looking for a progressive local school for his daughter Helen, and found none. Encouraged by his school principal friend Bert Stevens, he rallied fellow parents around an inspiring vision: Eltham College, the first major secular independent school in Australia, funded by a cooperative of parents and designed by an architect as a shared resource for its local community.

The school pioneered bespoke, collaborative educational design, responding to its particular site, educational vision and community needs. Its award-winning Eltham College Community Association (ECCA) Centre, built in just six months, comprised a games hall, gymnasium, swim centre, squash court, restaurant and one of the first commercial childcare centres in Victoria. The combination was unlike anything produced by design templates.

This inspired then education minister Lindsay Thompson to challenge Clarke to deliver a second exemplar of educational design within six months. Gladstone Views Primary School became the first government school designed by a private architect. Clarke's design cemented change with its radical open-plan learning environment, which was delivered below the standard cost using a factory structure of steel frame, concrete floor and sawtooth roof.

This project showed politicians the benefits of bespoke design. The minister changed policy to allow schools to work directly with architects on designs that would respond to their vision and community needs. His successor co-opted the ECCA Centre concept and declared that every school in the state should have one, opening enormous design opportunities for Australian schools and architects.

In 1992, Clarke was made a Member of the Order of Australia "in recognition of service to the community through the design of schools that incorporate community facilities." Over a 56-year career, his innovative thinking influenced many other areas of architecture, too. Clarke Hopkins Clarke partner Dean Landy said Clarke was an early champion of what we now know as the 15-minute city. "In his later years, Les was very focused on the masterplanning and creation of new towns and activity centres across Victorian growth areas that were people-focused and aimed to help build more vibrant communities that integrated all the needs of daily life," Landy said.

Recently retired Clarke Hopkins Clarke partner Robert Goodliffe said Clarke's broad knowledge and intrinsic feel for masterplanning made him the go-to for initial concepts. "Les always knew where to start and how to site things," he recalled. "He'd draw up the initial concepts freehand and they always had great balance between requirements, plenty of flexibility, and made real commercial sense."

Clarke retired in 2016 but remained characteristically active in life and design well into his eighties. He was a loving husband, father and grandfather; a revered founding chairman and life member of Eltham College; and a former Eltham councillor and shire president. He was an exceptional human being whose legacy was profound.

Since his passing, people of all ages have shared remarkably similar stories about Clarke, who recognized something in them and took the risk to give them a go. Senior architectural technician Karin Matthews said that he gave everyone, from young graduates to senior designers, his undivided attention. "Whenever I needed to talk to him or ask a question, he would put his pen down, stop and listen, and talk to me," she said. "I think that's a measure of the man. He cared. If you put in, he would give you absolutely everything."

As an optimist and creative, he remained open to new approaches throughout his life. "With Les, you got the sense that there was always a solution and a way to work together to solve a problem, whether in a plan, on site or in life," Clarke Hopkins Clarke partner Cath Muhlebach recalled. "He knew the first solution wasn't the only one. Things had to be tested and worked through. I found that very inspiring. He was always very ready to scrunch up a drawing and start again."

– Simon Le Nepveu and Justin Littlefield are partners at Clarke Hopkins Clarke. Simon interviewed Clarke recently for an upcoming book about 50 years of designing schools as community hubs. Justin attended Eltham College, was hired by Clarke as a graduate architect and, through his encouragement, spearheaded the practice's move into healthcare.

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(BOOK) (REVIEWER) Philip Goad

An Unfinished Masterpiece

Gideon Haigh and Peter Elliott have joined journalistic and architectural forces to produce a “captivating chronicle” of the intriguing (and ongoing) development of Victoria’s Parliament House.

Books devoted to a single building are rare things. If written with critical acumen and poise, if beautifully illustrated and handsomely designed, they become, for me at least, rather like a favourite biography, something that one returns to again and again. This is the case with Gideon Haigh and Peter Elliott’s *An Unfinished Masterpiece* (Parliament of Victoria, 2022), the intriguing account of the turbulent life and times (and complex design origins) of arguably Australia’s most important nineteenth-century work of classicism: Victoria’s Parliament House on Spring Street, Melbourne. As the book’s title describes it, this is a building whose life is ongoing and evolving, and whose design by the brilliant (and supremely patient) architect Peter Kerr suggested the pursuit of ultimate aesthetic refinement. Therein lies its fascination: the building isn’t perfect – it had a shambolic exterior for decades – but its aspirations (however grandiose and hopeful) were. This book recognizes that tension, a quality shared by other great public buildings across the globe with messy histories and building programs that lasted decades, sometimes centuries.

The book is divided into two parts. The first section is journalist Gideon Haigh’s masterful telling of the story of Victoria’s parliament. He tells of parliament’s scrappy beginnings after the colony was proclaimed in 1851, when it was housed in St Patrick’s Hall near the corner of Bourke and Queen streets – an architecturally undistinguished space described later as being “as plain as four bare walls could make it”; the squabbles and political lobbying over the choice, quality and source of stone; the importance of books for Victoria’s parliamentarians and the creation of the building’s domed library, a jewel of classical design that was also a meeting place across political divides for decades; the ill-fated hopes for a magnificent dome that would have terminated the Bourke Street axis (and, as Haigh wryly observes, satisfied a sectarian desire among some to shield the Roman Catholic cathedral of St Patrick’s rising behind); the building’s temporary occupancy by Australia’s federal parliament from 1901 to 1927; the unforeseen role of women in the parliament; its Spring Street colonnade and steps as a place of demonstration and protest from the 1960s onward; the ignominious housing of members in a prefab fibre-cement office block (“the chook house”) in the building’s “backyard” in 1973; and, most recently, the semi-submerged Members’ Annexe Building (2015–18) designed by Peter Elliott Architecture and Urban Design, with its roof and courtyard gardens designed in collaboration with landscape architects Taylor Cullity Lethlean and garden designer Paul Thompson. Haigh introduces readers to his account with English tastemaker and poet laureate John Betjeman’s fulsome appraisal of the building in the 1979 television documentary series *Betjeman in Australia*. Betjeman announces to viewers, “Now get ready for an architectural treat.” Haigh asks readers to do the same, but his story is enriched by controversy and scandal, project missteps and construction challenges. The text is accompanied by colonial artist William Strutt’s never-before-published drawings of parliamentary sittings, as well as maps and images of early Melbourne, and satirical cartoons in the venerable tradition of political lampoon; it is a wonderful read.

The second half of the book contains a pictorial essay by Peter Elliott, architect for the new Members’ Annexe Building. It is a treasure trove of archival images, drawings, plans and photographs that chronologically accounts for not just the building but also the building’s place in Melbourne’s natural and urban landscapes from 1837 onward. What is exciting about these images, many of which describe Melbourne at various moments in its longer history, is that one might be visually reading the history of the city more generally. Significant, and this is true of Governor of Victoria Linda Dessau’s foreword and the introduction to Haigh’s six chapters, is the acknowledgment and recognition of the Indigenous presence in Naarm (the Melbourne region) and the long occupancy of the site of the future Parliament House as a meeting and gathering place. Robert Russell’s 1837 watercolour *Melbourne from the falls*,[1] included as a double-page spread, is stunning for its representation of the Wurundjeri people, their shelter and the stepping stones across Birrarung (the Yarra River) where freshwater met saltwater. The dozens of images that follow depict the extraordinary transformations of the landscape in fewer than 20 years and indicate the ambitious vision to create a metropolis upon foundations of ruthless colonial expansion and land speculation – all catapulted forward by the discovery of gold in 1851. While the exterior of “Spring Street” has entered the realm of public consciousness, it is the building’s lavishly decorated interiors that present this most dramatic contrast and also caused public rancour (inside and outside parliament). These interiors, specifically the Roman-inspired Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council Chamber (1856), parliamentary library (1861) and Queen’s Hall (1879) – all designed by Kerr – are extraordinary commitments to the realization of this ornament of empire. Elliott’s pictorial essay is peppered with archival and contemporary renderings and photographs, along with Kerr’s beautiful drawings for these spaces (including his fabulous 1879 drawing for the encaustic floor tiling of the main vestibule and drawings for furniture, such as the library’s 10-sided table) as well as for the dome. The majesty of these images contrasts with Elliott’s gentle sketches for the Members’ Annexe – meeting the long overdue need to replace the chook house and at the same time making fundamental the desire to recall the site’s landscape origins. Published by the Library of the Parliament of Victoria and exquisitely designed by Stuart Geddes, *An Unfinished Masterpiece* is a captivating chronicle of a building growing and maturing in the landscape of its city.

— Philip Goad is Chair of Architecture, Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor and Co-Director of the Australian Centre for Architectural History, Urban and Cultural Heritage (ACAHUCH) at the University of Melbourne.

(FOOTNOTES)

(1) Robert Russell, *Melbourne from the falls*, 1837 [watercolour], Rex Nan Kivell Collection, National Library of Australia, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-134644646/view.

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(DISCUSSION)

Talking circular: Lasse Lind on designing-in the capacity to change

(INTERVIEWER) Philip Oldfield

As the research group at Copenhagen-based 3XN Architects, GXN focuses on circular design, behavioural design, and technology, pushing for industry innovations to make built environments more sustainable. Philip Oldfield spoke to GXN partner Lasse Lind about the group's role and what's hindering the shift.

(ABOVE) Lasse Lind believes that the role of an architect is "to be the mediator between a lot of different professions and fields of knowledge." Photograph: Adam Mørk.

(OPPOSITE) A demonstrator facade for Circle House. GXN led the design, which enables structural components to be reused after the product is dismantled. Photograph: Tom Jersø.

GXN is a vocal advocate for greater circularity in built environments. The group led the design of Circle House, which is Denmark's first circular social housing project – 90 percent of its building materials are intended for future re-use. GXN also authored the influential *Building a Circular Future* report (2016), which captured the business and societal cases for circularity in built environment industries. Closer to home, 3XN and GXN (along with local practice BVN) led the radical upcycling of Sydney's 1976 AMP Centre, creating the Quay Quarter Tower and saving an estimated 8,000 tonnes of embodied carbon.

PHILIP OLDFIELD Could you tell me a little bit about GXN and its relationship to 3XN?

LASSE LIND GXN was established 16 years ago. In the beginning, it was an attempt to make a research and development department as part of an architectural company, which was not normal at that time. There was a notion at the office that a lot of innovation was happening in other industries, and we wanted to create some kind of vehicle or space where people would get time to try to acquire that knowledge and figure out whether or not it was relevant to the building industry.

We have three areas of interest. One is what we call circular design – that's sustainability, but with the big focus on materials and the materials economy and re-use and recycling and upcycling. Then we have what we call behavioural design, which is very much a social science – it's about understanding people's behaviour in the built environment and how we can turn insights around people's behaviour into design strategies. You could say that workstream started very much with the design of 3XN, where there's always been a belief that architecture can facilitate social behaviour and bring people together. And then we have the third one, which we have now labelled technology – and, of course, that's a big one. I think it's very hard to deal with research and innovation in the built environment and not think about technology because it's affecting everything that we do.

So, the relationship between 3XN and GXN is an ever-evolving one. But if you had to cut it down: 3XN does buildings, and GXN does a lot of things around buildings.

PO You mentioned that circular design is one of the three areas you're focused on, and there's no doubt it's a theme that's taking off in architecture. For you, what does circular design mean and why is it important to the built environment?

LL For me, circular design has different aspects. There's the upstream consequences of the built environment: how are we sourcing materials and are they actually sourced in a sustainable way that the planet can handle? And there's the downstream: what happens in the afterlife and what happens in the future? As architects, or as builders, we design to a specific condition and point in time, and a specific client and user and whatever. But actually, what happens to the building stock is very hard to predict as a designer when you're doing something in the present. For me, the other part of circularity is to understand that you also have to design-in the capacity to change and to transform and to ultimately recycle in the future. It's all based on the fact that there's a scarcity of virgin materials. We have to understand that we cannot accommodate increasing urbanization with virgin materials. We simply have to look at other materials streams. The production system that we have is, very broadly, a "take, make and waste" system. We should be looking at nature, which has a balanced system of recycling or not creating waste. Ultimately, we should be trying to create a system that works in a similar way. It is that way of thinking that we've been trying to employ in our projects for the last 10 years.

PO GXN has done a number of significant research projects on circular design. What are some of the key things that you've found that architects need to listen to?

LL One is the notion of the architect being a sort of supreme person who could just decide and then everyone would follow. We need to be much more involved with parts of the value chain that traditional architects would not involve themselves with: demolition contractors, people that handle materials, facility managers. I think the role of an architect is really to be the mediator between a lot of different professions and fields of knowledge.

One thing we've learned from the research is that, technologically, there's not actually a lot preventing us from doing the things we should be doing. It is other stuff preventing the shift in the built environment. It can be legal stuff; it can be insurers. But it's not that there is some technological gadget missing for us to be able to build in a much more circular and sustainable way. It can be done. It has been done. It's a systemic problem. It's a structural problem.

PO If this is not a technological challenge, what are the biggest challenges we need to overcome to make this shift into circular design a reality?

LL Probably the single biggest challenge is short-term investments. If investors want to make a quick buck, it's very hard to get them to think about anything that has to do with longer-term commitments. That's where you need legislation. That's one challenge. And I think there's a general challenge in capacity-building across the industry. We try to involve ourselves a lot with knowledge-sharing projects – all the stuff we do is open-source [in an attempt to] get enough people to know and to be interested and understand ... It's not because it's undoable from a technical perspective, it just needs to be on people's agenda, right?

PO Given that you're working in Denmark and Australia, how do you think Australia is faring in this space?

LL It's interesting with Australia because there are some areas where Australia is quite advanced. I mean, we've been able to do Quay Quarter Tower in Australia, which is a project I don't think has been [replicated] in different places – there was a contractor and a client and an environment ready to do a project like that. And I've been quite involved, for example, with water recycling and cleaning technology, and Australia has some very, very cool companies doing water-cleaning tech.

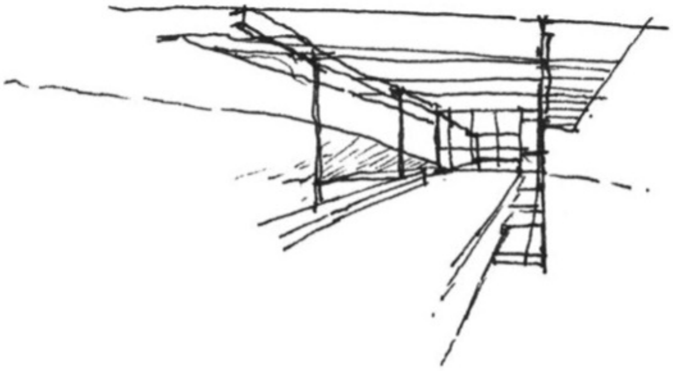
Then there will be other areas – like energy consumption of buildings, where you'll have loads of buildings with single glazing and lots of air-handling units guzzling away and all that stuff – where I think Australia is quite behind compared to most European countries. So, it's a bit of a mix in that sense. I've met quite a lot of people in the industry who know a lot and are quite engaged and so on. But maybe at a political level, it's not been great. I think the political level needs to catch up a bit to where the industry is.

— Lasse Lind is an architect and partner at GXN and 3XN Architects in Copenhagen, where he is head of consultancy. He specializes in sustainability and the circular economy in the construction industry.

— Philip Oldfield is head of school at UNSW Built Environment and author of *The Sustainable Tall Building: A Design Primer*.

Shack in the Rocks

(COUNTRY)	Wadawurrung
(REVIEWER)	Katelin Butler
(PHOTOGRAPHER)	Earl Carter



(ARCHITECT)

Sean Godsell Architects

In the rocky plains west of Melbourne, Sean Godsell Architects has reduced a weekender to its essential elements in a refined design that both inhabits and provides refuge from its harsh and spectacular surrounds.

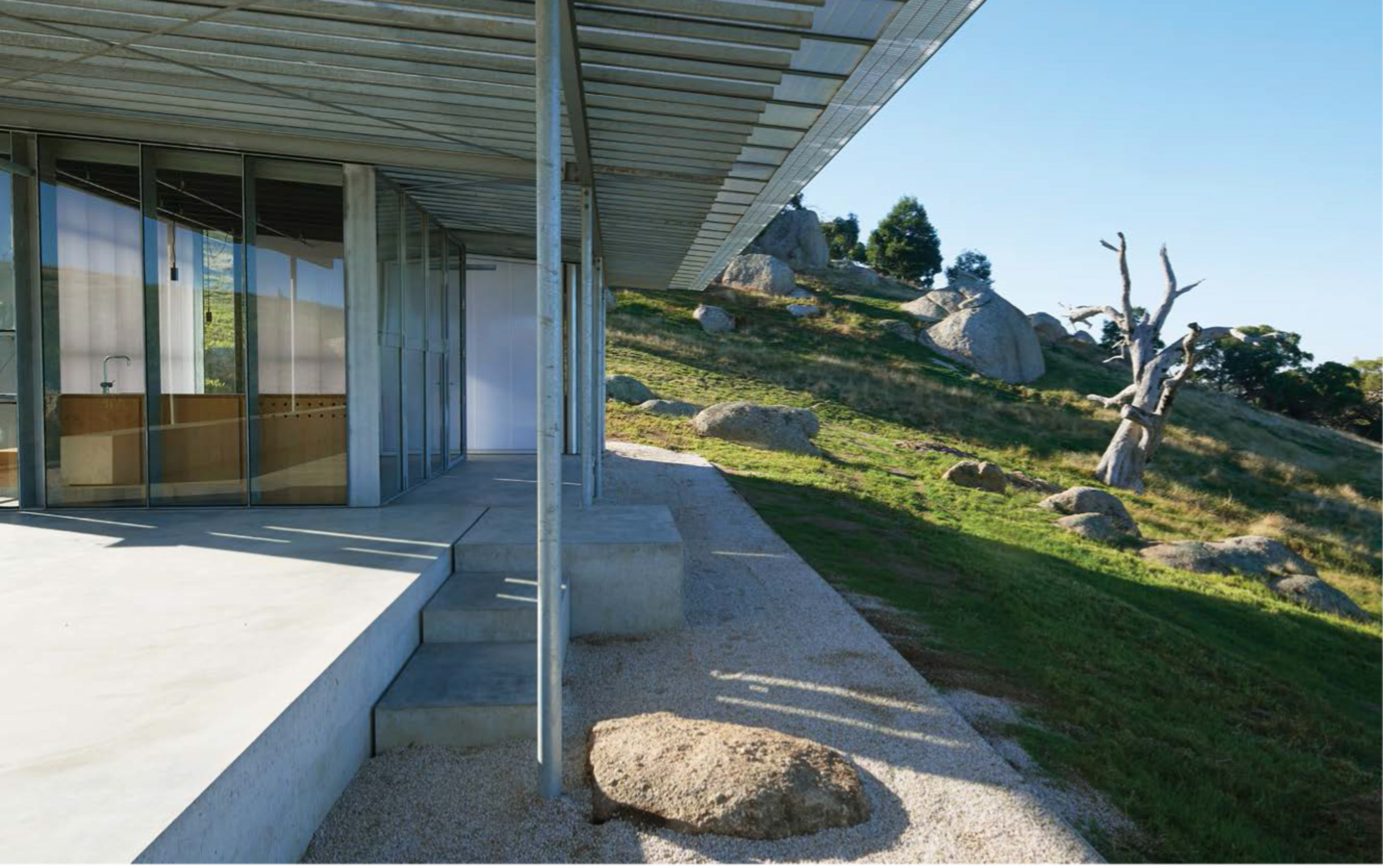
The pleasure of camping comes from the simple things – some food, a shelter, connection to nature and the ability to switch off from the pressures of contemporary life. On multi-day hikes, rudimentary huts along the way might afford a moment of retreat from the continuous exposure. Designed by 2022 Gold Medallist Sean Godsell, Shack in the Rocks provides a weekend shelter for photographer Earl Carter and his partner Wanda Tucker – or, as Godsell describes, a "polite camping experience – all you really need is a shower, a bathroom, somewhere to make a coffee and sleep."

Located on Wadawurrung Country, approximately one hour's drive west of Melbourne, the shack's internal floor area is only 32 square metres. The surrounding land is distinctively punctuated by massive, weather-beaten granite boulders. European settlement commenced in the area in the late 1830s, with the granting of pastoral leases. In the 1850s, gold mining created a demand for timber, and much of the forest was cut down. As the fifth generation of her family to own this land – her father was born on the property – Wanda is determined to regenerate it and has planted more than 5,000 trees to date.

The climatic conditions of this part of the world are often extreme, with winds reaching 100 kilometres per hour as they accelerate up the hill. Rather than fighting the natural environmental systems, the majority of Godsell's structure is open to the elements, and the protected living and sleeping quarters are kept to a minimum footprint. Retreating into the glazed kitchen hub or the cosy bedroom is a similar experience to jumping into a car after a long coastal walk on a cold day.

The concept of breaking down the program of a house into modules comes from Godsell's research into the Yamakawa Cottage (1977) and the Ishii House (1978) in Japan, both by Riken Yamamoto and Field Shop. In the case of the Yamakawa Cottage, the gable roof is the controlling element that defines both the interior and exterior portions of the house. Similarly, at Shack in the Rocks, a translucent parasol roof hovers above the various portions and unites the structural elements. This hovering roof form marks the place to pause and appreciate the views across the low-lying Werribee Plain to the spectacular You Yangs mountain range.

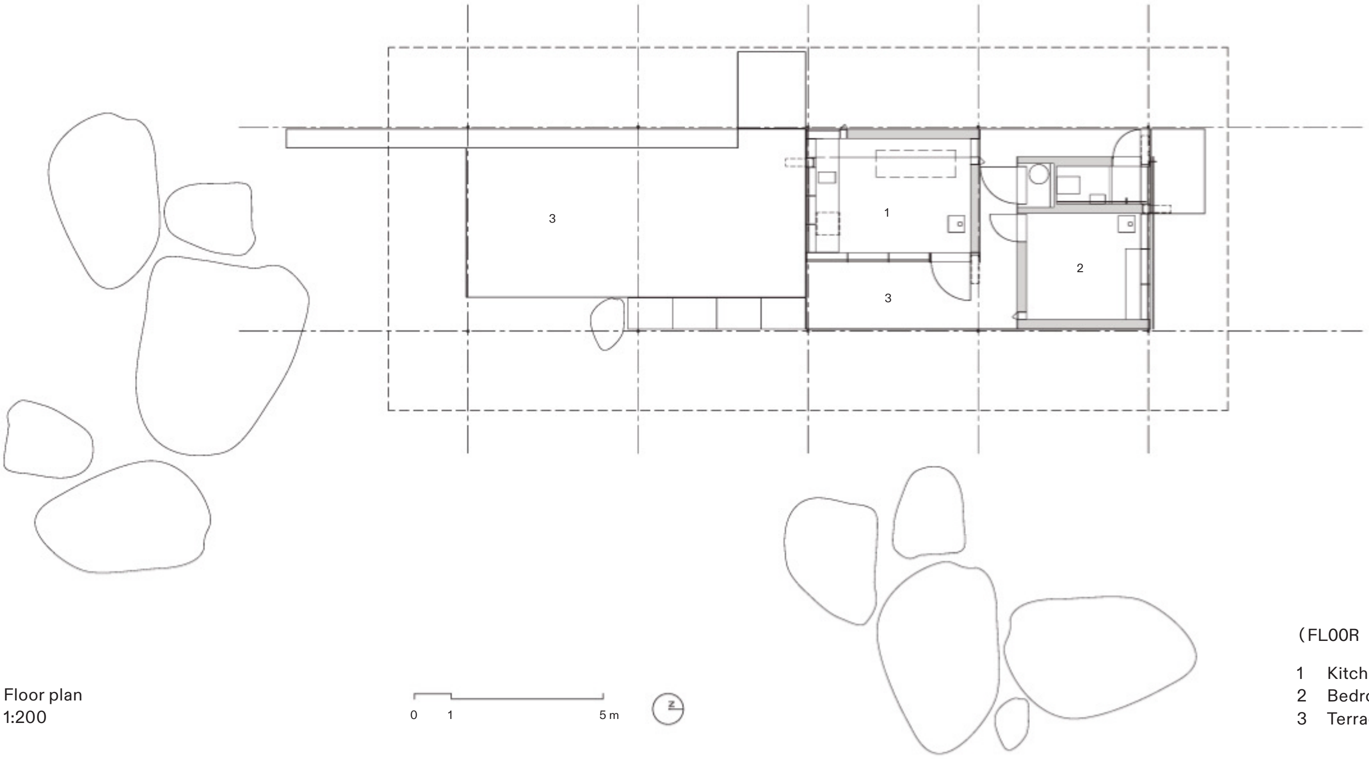
(PREVIOUS)	The design embraces rather than fights the elements, which can be unrelenting at this rocky site west of Melbourne.
(BELOW)	Expansive views from the glazed kitchen module give the impression of space despite the tiny footprint.
(OPPOSITE)	To keep costs down, the architect used a modular system and off-the-shelf components.



Godsell also cites the quintessential hayshed as inspiration for the form of Shack in the Rocks, with the shed being the parasol and the haybales the accommodation modules. This idea carried through into the construction. As Godsell explained, “We wanted to make a building that could be made from components you could buy from any hardware store. We can make architecture from off-the-shelf components.” This approach kept the cost down, but also meant that the clients were able to be heavily involved in the construction process. It also raises the question as to whether this modular building might be replicated and/or adapted for other sites – which it very well could be, and perhaps in alternative materials.

The resulting refinement and reduction of the shack to its minimal footprint wouldn’t be possible without the existing “mothership” or service shed that is located about 100 metres away, at the top of the hill. These buildings are both built off the grid, with services such as electricity and water running underground from the shed to the shack. The shack relies on its exposure to cool itself, with cross-breezes caught in its louvred windows. The parasol roof might have been used for water capture or solar power, though it would compromise its elegant aesthetic.

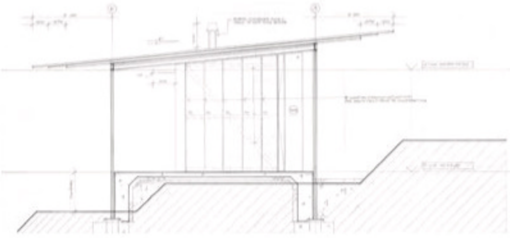
Inside the modules, custom-made furniture by Fred Ganim makes use of every millimetre – even the bed. Although the interior spaces are minimal, everything is well designed and has its place. This design strategy has a way of simplifying everything and consequently clearing the mind. The emphasis is on experiencing the rugged and sublime landscape setting.



(FLOOR PLAN KEY)

1 Kitchen/Living
2 Bedroom
3 Terrace

Floor plan
1:200



Section
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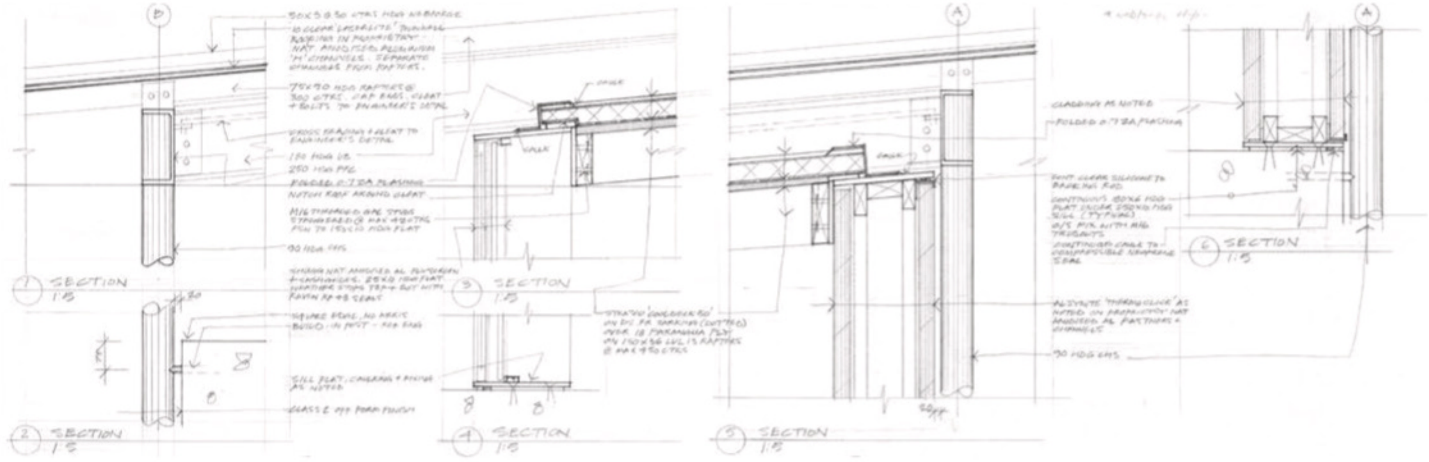
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Detailed sections
1:20

Despite the raw and robust materiality of the house, there is a warmth and subtlety within the interior spaces. The glazed kitchen pod uses the expansive horizon views to give the impression of space and, while showering, the occupant can enjoy the rocky hillside vista through the bathroom pod's open door. Like Godsell's other houses, Shack in the Rocks is a highly controlled composition of sightlines – it tells you when and where you can look at the view. For example, bedroom views to the You Yangs are deliberately obscured by opaque panels. To continue the camping analogy, you need to leave the tent or sleeping pod to appreciate where you are in the world. You also need to go outside to use the bathroom – even when the rain is coming in sideways, as it sometimes does in this extreme environment.

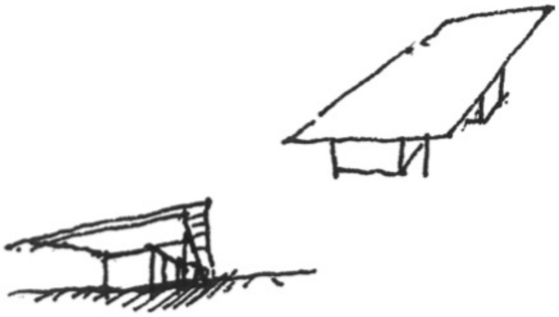
The client–architect dialogue around Shack in the Rocks is a continuation of an ongoing discussion initiated by the design of Earl and Wanda's coastal home, the Carter Tucker House, designed by Godsell between 1998 and 2000. In formal and material terms, the houses aren't similar, but they both challenge the inhabitant to live in a particular way – which is, perhaps, what lured the owners back to Godsell for a second time. This isn't to say that the houses don't provide a level of comfort, but their designs do suggest a rethinking of the status quo. It is important to remember that Shack in the Rocks is intended as a temporary home – one that can be easily locked up and left when it's time to head back to the city.

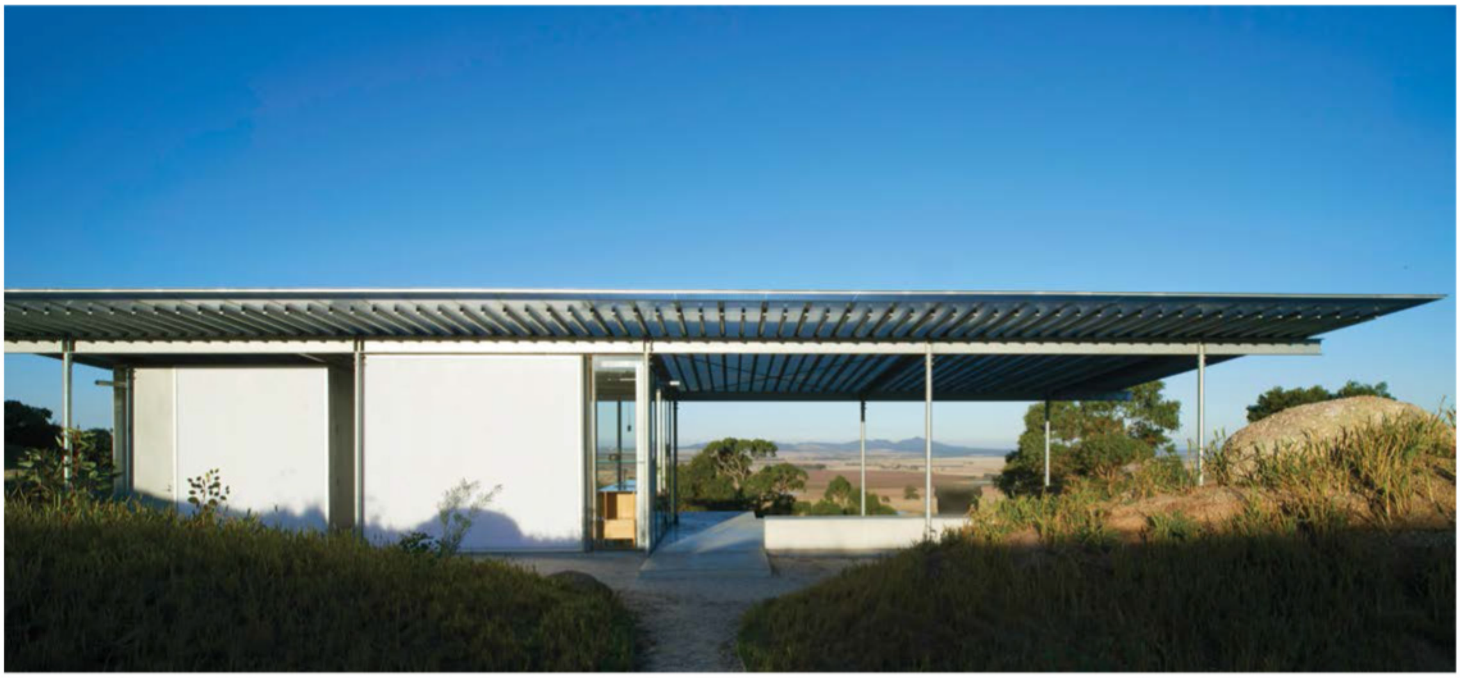
Although the original design for Shack in the Rocks was shelved because of budget constraints, the final building shows no hint of compromise. As is expected in a Sean Godsell design, the detailing is exquisite – and even in the strongest of winds, nothing shakes or moves other than the freestanding outdoor furniture. Although there isn't a lot of space, the shack is a pleasure to inhabit because everything has been designed and made well. In the context of the many sprawling holiday houses that are used only on the occasional weekend, this is a more responsible solution. It accepts a level of occupant discomfort, just like camping does – but also incites a deeper appreciation of our place in the world.

— Katelin Butler is the editorial director of Architecture Media and a graduate of architecture.

(PREVIOUS) Like other Sean Godsell Architects houses, Shack in the Rocks challenges the occupants to live in a particular way.

(BELOW) The translucent parasol roof unites the structural elements and salutes the archetypal hayshed.





Architect Sean Godsell Architects; Project team Sean Godsell, Hayley Franklin; Builder R and B Kahle; Structural engineer OPS Engineers; Building surveyor Nelson McDermott; Furniture and joinery Fred Ganim

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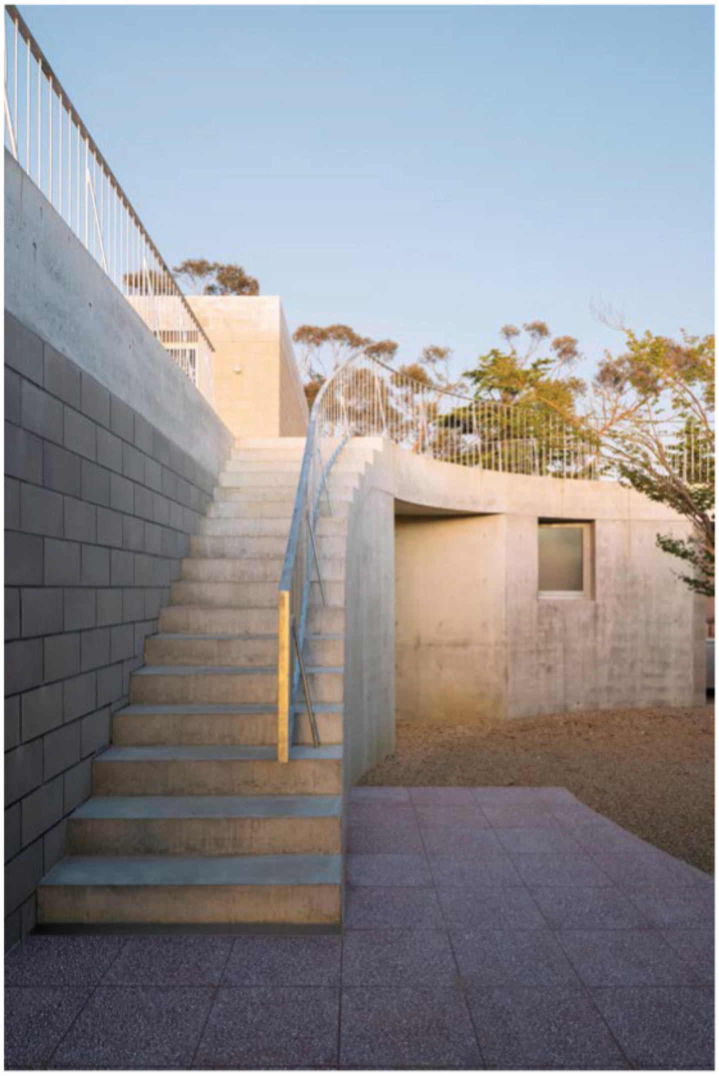
Blue Mountains House

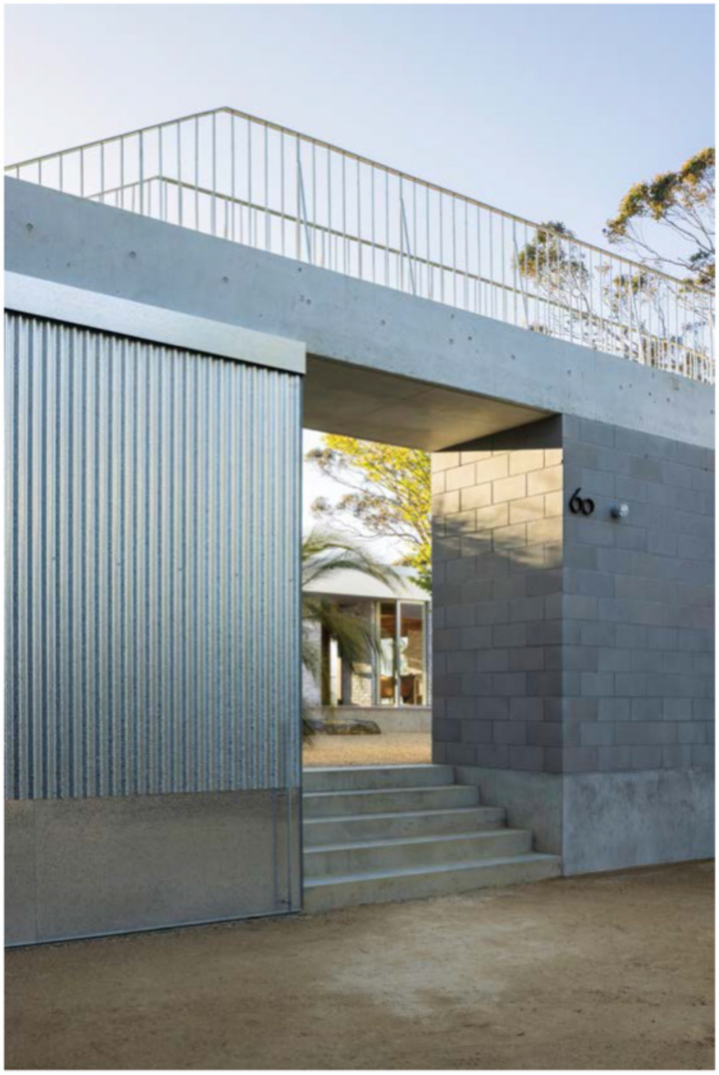
(COUNTRY) Gundungurra and Dharug
(REVIEWER) David Welsh
(PHOTOGRAPHER) Clinton Weaver

On the edge of a ridge west of Sydney, Anthony Gill Architects has set up a theatrical performance, linking a 1970s home with a new guesthouse in a single composition that both occupies the landscape and respects its magnificence.

(ARCHITECT)

Anthony Gill Architects





Architecture is often drawn to the edge. Whether it's the ocean edge or the edge of the valley, the enticement to build at the edge inevitably finds the architect, consciously or otherwise, starting to gather things in – sampling, reflecting, optimizing and performing. The edge on which the architecture unfolds becomes a stage, and the performance begins. Some performances miss the mark; they become another building simply providing protection from the caprices of the weather, disengaged and defensive, blithely taking in the view. But just like the theatre, when you experience architecture that is truly engaging, it becomes transformative. When design truly connects with context, seeking to become part of the place, the result can be remarkable.

When Anthony Gill Architects was commissioned to create a new house in the Blue Mountains on the western edge of Sydney, it was around an existing single-storey house built in the 1970s. A modified Pettit and Sevitt Lowline, this house had been built at the edge of a ridge to take in the breathtaking view across the valley. An essential part of the brief was to create, in effect, two houses in one – a family house and a guesthouse. A strategy to keep the spirit of the original Lowline through the introduction of a new architectural response sets up a performative piece between old and new that establishes a new relationship between building and site.

From the street, the new built form presents a wall that is part proscenium, part frontispiece, and neither purely decorative nor purely informative. Through an aperture in the wall, a mise en scène unfolds, with the courtyard and houses beyond. The plan, however,

(PREVIOUS)	The existing 1970s house and the new guesthouse are brought together by curved lines that establish a stage-like courtyard.
(ABOVE LEFT)	External concrete stairs add to the theatricality of the design, enticing the visitor to ascend.
(ABOVE RIGHT)	An aperture in the street-facing wall offers a glimpse of the courtyard and houses beyond.
(OPPOSITE)	From the terrace, where a games room hides inside a “fly-tower-like” concrete volume, the valley appears to unfold below.

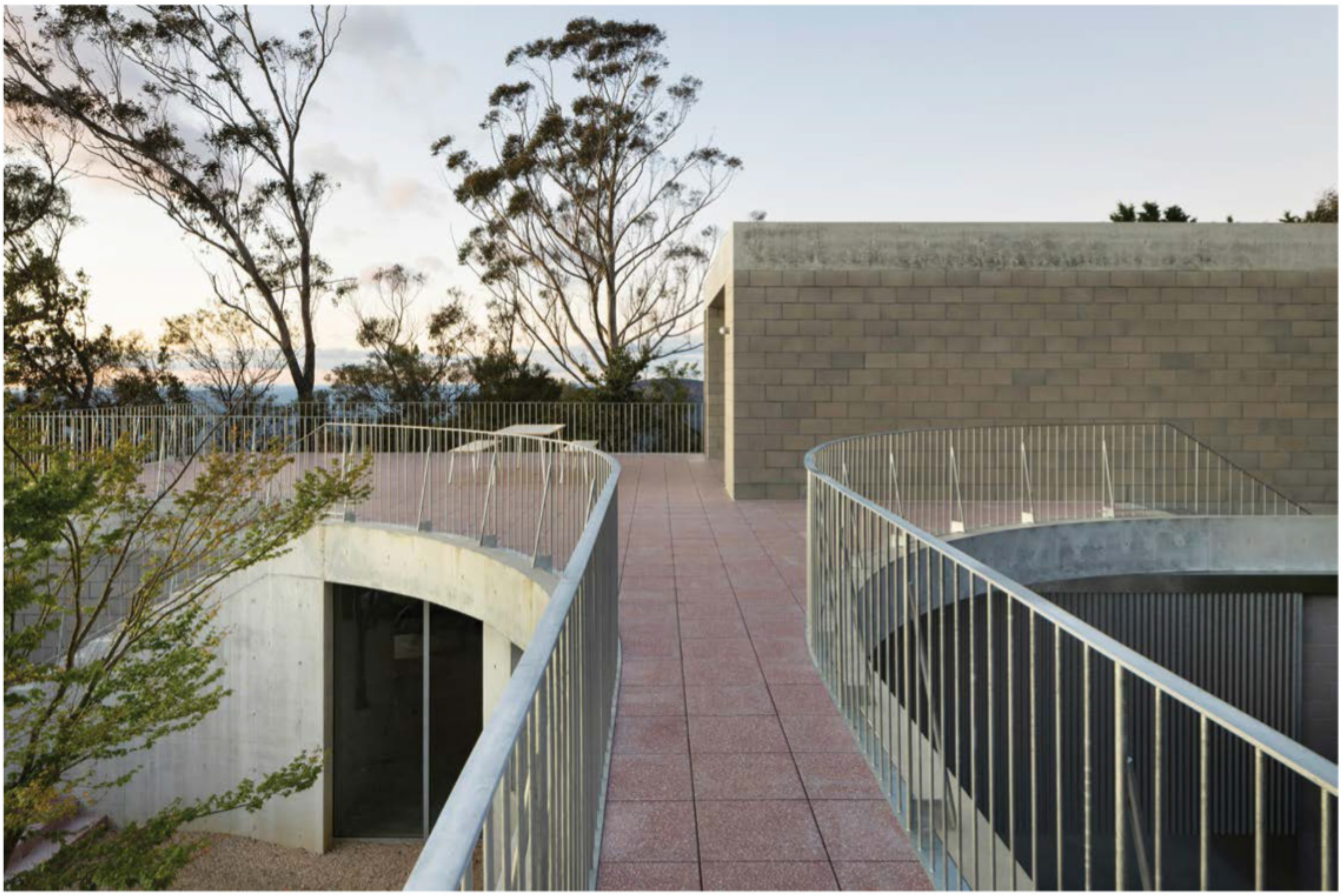
reveals that the project is far from a walled enclave; rather, it is a type of Venn diagram with two overlapping built forms set at 90 degrees to each other. Similar in size, the two forms are interlocked by two curved lines that establish a stage-like courtyard that brings the buildings together. As one curve extends, proboscis-like in plan, to trace the line of the proscenium/frontispiece wall, the other manifests as an elegant, pink terrazzo terrace. This terrace establishes the piano nobile of the house, its leading edge sitting snugly against the inside of the guesthouse wall and terminating in a short perron with concrete stairs.

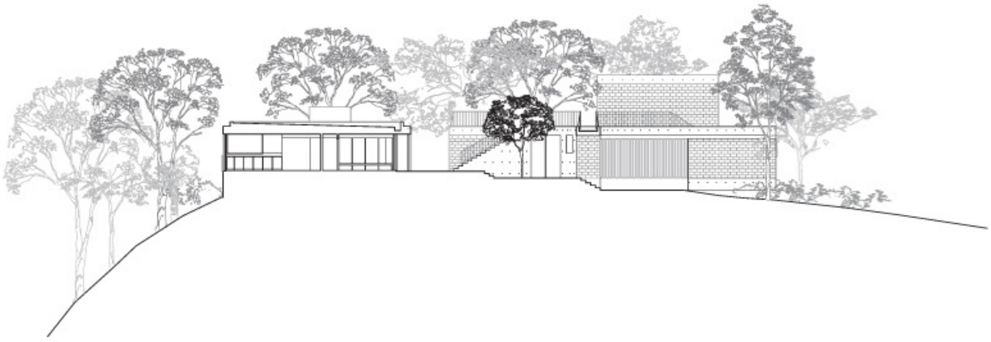
This point in the performance also sees the transition from the existing to the new – a shift from the elemental to the sculptural. In the existing house and its preset kit of material components, the material selection drives the architectural response. In the guesthouse, this relationship is reversed; the sculptural intent of the architectural response is at the fore, with the material selection of concrete and block serving to realize the intended geometry and scale.

The choreography of form and space evolves like the Serial Vision of Gordon Cullen – where the user/visitor is led through the composition of space by a series of visual cues. The theatrical slow draw through the house soon begins to reveal glimpses of the majesty of the valley beyond. Tension is established at this point, where the curved terrazzo plane starts to widen and the entry reveals the entry to the new house, hidden behind a theatrical flight of concrete stairs that will you to explore the rampart above.

The primary architectural element of the stair is often used in cinema and theatre as a vehicle to explore – light and shadow, action and spectacle – and to shift perspective. Whether it's a set for Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers to dance or Marilyn Monroe to parade, or an esoteric time-lapse observation like David Lynch's 2004 *Intervalometer Experiments*, the stair is a place where, in Lynch's words, "magical things can happen."[1] So too in architecture, where the external stair as either backdrop or motif has manifested in countless forms, with the essence of movement explored in various ways. From Hugh Buhrich's terrifying spiral event in Castlecrag, through the restraint of Vincent Van Duysen's Casa M, to the built form absolute of Libera's Casa Malaparte, the stair as an idea in modern architecture has presented a myriad of architectural expressions. In this house, the external stair seems to invite the visitor to ascend for an exclusive look at what lies beyond – namely, a discreet games room in a fly-tower-like concrete volume set back from the edges of the courtyard facade, with the imposing expanse of the valley unfolding beyond.

Subtle amendments to the original Lowline footprint have made the house more generous and usable. The floor plan has been shifted out a metre, allowing the living space of the original house to be expanded. Sliding the kitchen out to the line of the original deck sets up a ship's bridge that seems to hover over the valley below. Original bedroom and service rooms have also been rearranged to allow an additional bedroom and more flexible auxiliary living spaces.

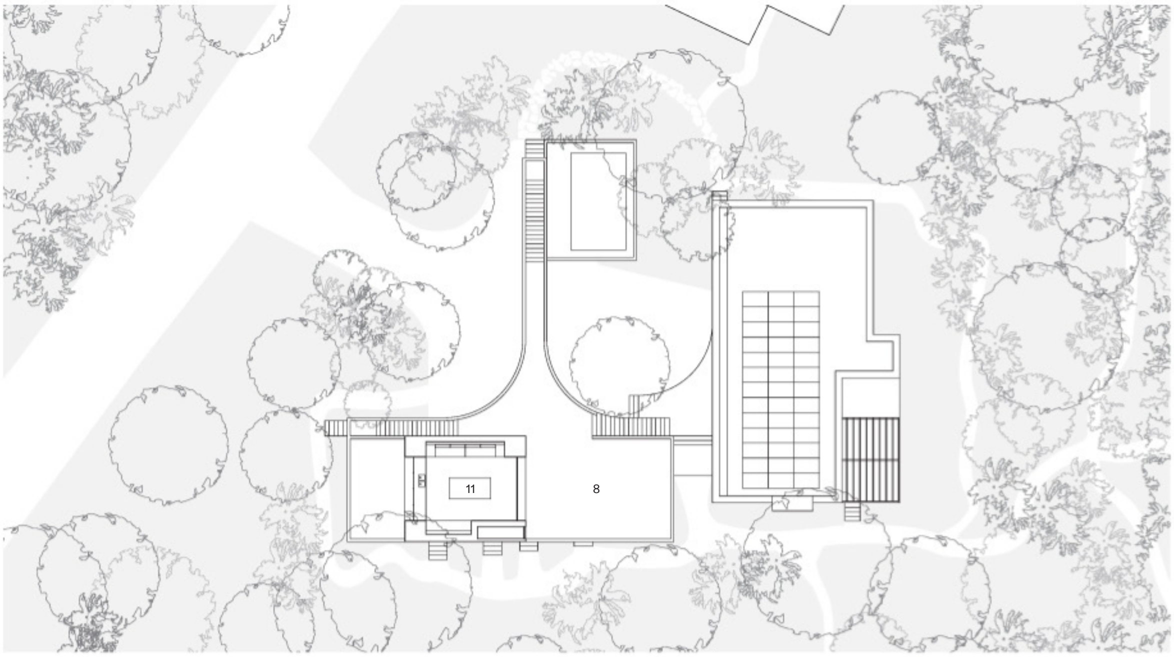




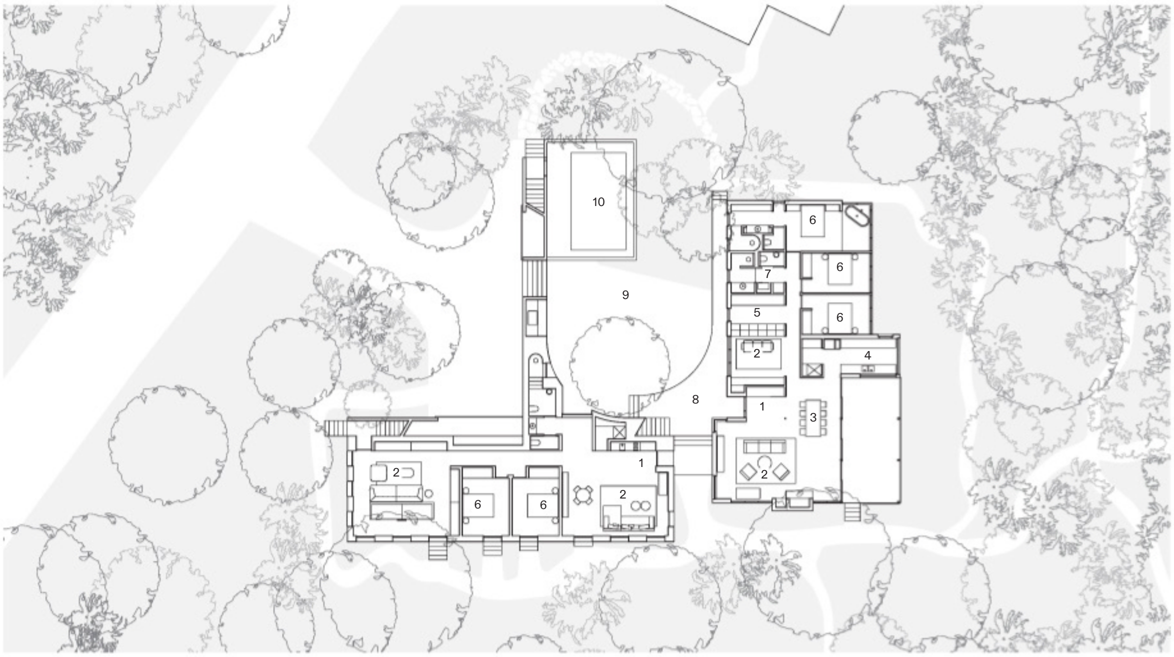
Section
1:500

(FLOOR PLAN KEY)

1	Entry
2	Lounge
3	Dining
4	Kitchen
5	Study
6	Bed
7	Laundry
8	Terrace
9	Courtyard
10	Pool
11	Games room



First floor
1:500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Ground floor
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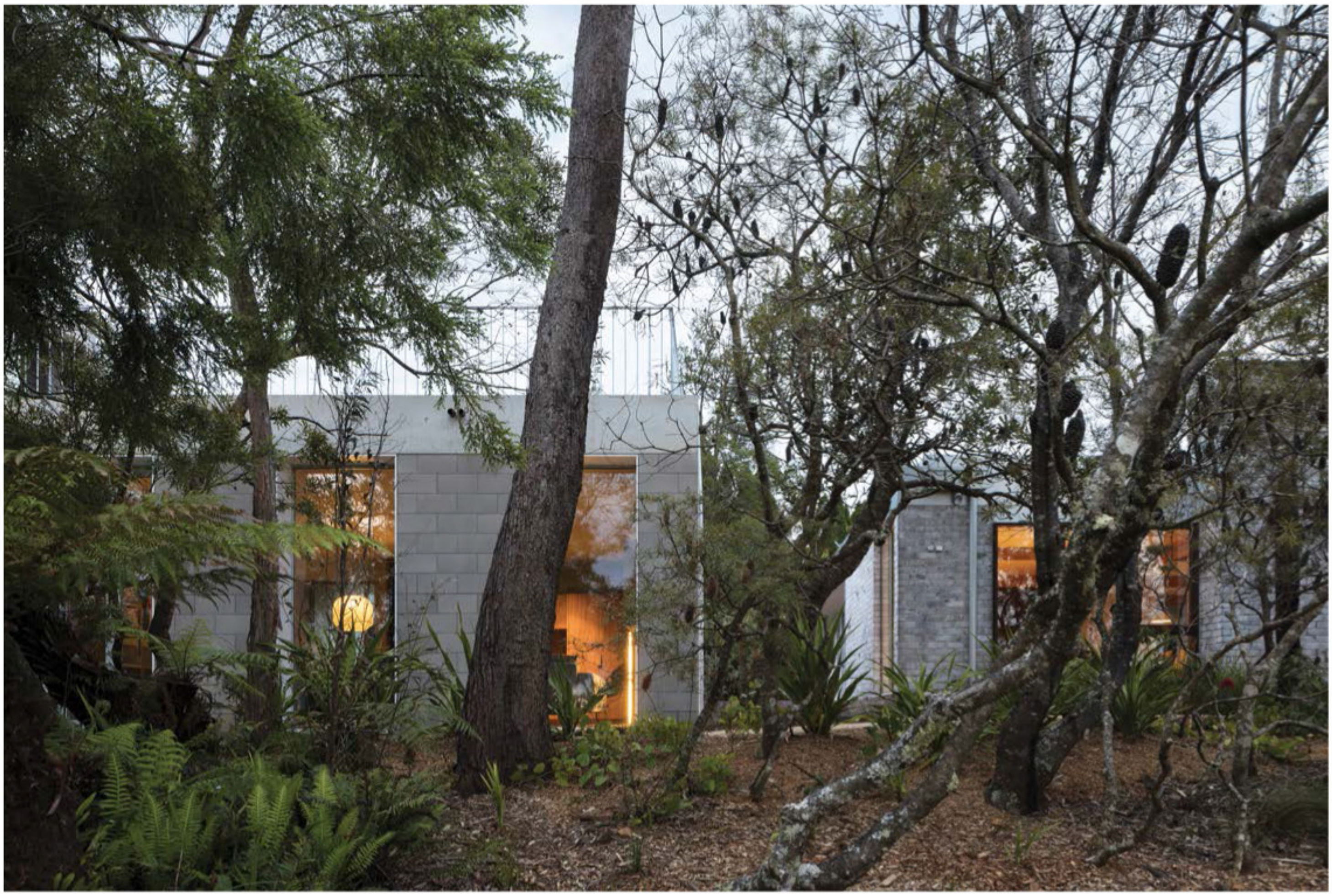
(ABOVE) The guesthouse interiors feature the same timber and stone as the original house.

(RIGHT) In material and form, the design connects confidently yet respectfully with its culturally significant context.



(ABOVE) Through the use of colour and texture, the two buildings have been tied into a single composition.

The original exposed timber beams have been stripped back and a new timber floor introduced. The clinker bricks have been retained and whitewashed in a datum set between floor and roof structure that is echoed in the arrangement of the blockwork and concrete beams of the new walls and guesthouse. The harmonious scale shift between new and old, between concrete and block to timber and brick, serves as a minor-key variation, with similar – but not the same – colouration and texture adding a considered complexity that ties the two buildings into a single composition.

The scale of the guesthouse slightly shifts up from the original house. Taller spaces feature the same masonry palette as the exterior, augmented with spotted-gum-faced plywood joinery and marble-lined wet areas at a human scale. The same timber and stone feature in the original house – another ligament that binds the old and new spaces together as a coherent whole.

This house is a confident performance of overlaps and overlays. It is in many ways analogous to the paths and processes that have been used to traverse these Dharug and Gundungurra lands for millennia. In a place where the landscape is so overwhelming, so powerful and so culturally important, the decision to enclose, define, and of course occupy some of that landscape is a charged one. The resolve to connect with the land meaningfully rather than fleetingly has resulted in a respectful composition of material and form that is a wonderful pageant of an engaged, enriched, respectful architecture.

— David Welsh is a director of Sydney-based practice Welsh and Major and a current New South Wales Chapter Councillor for the Australian Institute of Architects.

Architect Anthony Gill Architects; Project team Anthony Gill, Isabell Adam, Andrew Skulina, Aurelie Nguyen, Sean Dean; Builder Robert Plumb Build; Urban planner PGH Environmental Planning; Quantity surveyor QS Plus; Structural and hydraulic engineer Partridge; Interior design Karen McCartney and David Harrison at Design Daily; Landscape architect Dangar Barin Smith; Bushfire consultant Bushfire Hazard Solutions; Ecologist Aquila Ecological Surveys; Building surveyor C and A Surveyors Sydney

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(FOOTNOTES)

(1) From the introduction to David Lynch's *Intervalometer Experiments* (2004).

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UNSETTLING
QUEENSTOWN

The 2023 Australian Venice Biennale exhibition 'unsettling Queenstown' will be unveiled at the 18th International Biennale Architettura in Venice, Italy, 18 May 2023. Open to the public 20 May – 26 November 2023.

Australian
Institute of
Architects

From the series *Isolation*, 2022, Sarah Rhodes

Unsettling Queenstown explores contemporary architectural tactics and projects in the context of *decolonisation*. Responding to the international theme it looks through the lens of *Queenstown* in *lutruwita* and on *Kaurna yarta*, as both a real place and an idea. The exhibition encompasses a ghostly fragment of colonial architecture, immersive sounds and imagery, and propositions of 'Country Demapped;' a third, fictional, and *unsettled*, Queenstown.

unsettlingqueenstown.org

Australian Institute of Architects'

National Prizes

2023

(68) Gold Medal
(69) National President's Prize
(70) Paula Whitman Leadership in Gender Equity Prize
(70) Leadership in Sustainability Prize
(71) Neville Quarry Architectural Education Prize
(71) Bluescope Glenn Murcutt Student Prize
(72) Student Prize for the Advancement of Architecture
(73) Dulux Study Tour

(GOLD MEDAL)

Kerstin Thompson

The Gold Medal is the Australian Institute of Architects' highest honour. It recognizes distinguished service by architects who have designed or executed buildings of high merit, produced work of great distinction resulting in the advancement of architecture, or endowed the profession of architecture in a distinguished manner. The 2023 recipient of the Gold Medal is Kerstin Thompson.

Thompson is an outstanding architect whose design practice is renowned internationally as a significant and innovative reference point in Australian architecture and urban design. For more than three decades, she has contributed generously to architectural discourse across the country through her work as a designer, educator and highly respected keynote speaker. Further, she has displayed dedication to the profession through extensive efforts with the Australian Institute of Architects, including "captaincy" at the 2019 National Architecture Conference, creative directorship of the 2005 National Architecture Conference, co-curatorship of Australia's official contribution to the 2008 Venice Architecture Biennale, and participation in countless design panels and juries – all while leading her practice with a level of skill, consideration and aesthetic to which many aspire.

Spanning varying scales, from large public projects to intricate domestic architecture, Thompson's sublime work is at once generous, bold and highly nuanced. Taking its cues from the context, it creates a built form that allows the setting to take centre stage. Thompson employs a sleight of hand that makes every moment one of discovery: at Bundanon, the landscape is amplified, while at the Victorian College of the Arts, heritage takes on a newfound vibrancy. Her interventions are taut and beautiful in their own right, delivering a sense of wonder and inquiry to even the most experienced of her peers.

Integrating sustainable principles and a multidisciplinary approach to architecture, Thompson's work is framed by a deep understanding of ecology and landscape. She has set precedents in her determination to extend the useful life of existing buildings. Finally, the distinctive economy and lean sensibility of her designs highlight the value and beauty of finite resources.

In the field of heritage architecture, Thompson's work is particularly notable in the inventive ways that it addresses memory and establishes resonance between old and new. The Melbourne Holocaust Museum employs a finely detailed yet infinitely simple recessed line to circumscribe the historic building; a line has never worked so hard, and yet appeared so effortless, in carrying the immense burden of joining old with new. Internally, the building's focus on light serves to keep memory alive, so that society might never forget the lessons of the past.

Thompson is the creative design director across all projects at Kerstin Thompson Architects (KTA). The practice itself is an exemplar studio that has encouraged young practitioners to venture out and shape new practices around strongly held principles. Thompson founded KTA after formative experiences at Melbourne practice Robinson Chen, commencing with a series of residential commissions. These were immediately recognized as assured, inventive and part of the continuum of Melbourne's residential architecture scene established generations earlier.

KTA's contribution to the architectural fabric of our built environment has been recognized by numerous awards at state, national and international level. The practice was the recipient of the 2020 Victorian Architecture Medal, the state's highest honour and a recognition of excellence across all award categories, for the Broadmeadows Town Hall project; KTA is the first practice with a sole female founder to have been awarded the medal. In 2022, KTA was awarded the Sir Zelman Cowen Award for Public Architecture for Bundanon Art Museum and Bridge, a project involving new site-wide works that are equal parts subtle and dramatic, preserving and transforming. The works, which show how architecture can be used to provide pathways out of the current state of climate crisis partially brought about by our built environment, was also awarded a National Award for Sustainable Architecture.

The Australian Institute of Architects' Gold Medal is awarded in honour of the quality and breadth of Thompson's work, a design ethos that favours subtle expression and graciousness over force, and her propensity to address some of the biggest issues of our time. Through her work in academia and as a role model for women everywhere, she is an inspiration to the profession as a whole and to future generations of architects.

Architecture Australia's tribute to the 2023 Gold Medallist begins on page 77.

(JURY)

Shannon Battisson FRAIA (Chair) – National President,
Australian Institute of Architects | The Mill: Architecture and Design

Tony Giannone LFRAIA – Immediate Past President,
Australian Institute of Architects | Tectvs

Hank Koning LFRAIA – Koning Eizenberg

Julie Eizenberg LFRAIA – Koning Eizenberg

John Wardle LFRAIA – Wardle

(NATIONAL PRESIDENT'S PRIZE)

Catherine Townsend, Bruce Townsend, Dominic Pelle and Nathan Judd

In 2023, the National President's Prize is awarded to Catherine Townsend, Bruce Townsend, Dominic Pelle and Nathan Judd in recognition of their immense contribution to architecture over many decades through the Contemporary Australian Architects Speaker Series. Now in its thirty-sixth year, the series is an innovative and exciting platform that engages audiences both in Australia and overseas in conversations about the benefits of well-designed buildings and the contribution of architects and architecture to our society.

Canberra-based architects Bruce and Catherine Townsend initiated the series in 1987 under the auspices of the ACT Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects. Its aim was to provide an opportunity for ACT architects to hear Australia's leading contemporary practitioners speak about their work and their views on the state of the profession.

According to Catherine Townsend in a 2022 interview with the National Gallery of Australia, the idea behind the venture was to attract the "bright lights, the great and the good of architecture" to Canberra. "There were speaking circuits in Melbourne and Sydney, but we never got a look-in," she said. We felt the tyranny of distance like a stab in the heart and thought to ourselves, we must do something about it."

Since then, the annual series has grown in popularity, with its audience reaching well beyond the architectural profession. Building on its success, a partnership was established in 1995 between the National Gallery of Australia and the Institute. BCA Certifiers lent its support to the series in 2004 and remains the sole sponsor.

In 2004, after running the series for 17 years, Catherine and Bruce passed on the baton to fellow Canberra architects Dominic Pelle and Nathan Judd, who are the current convenors. Although no longer involved in the curation and running of the series, Catherine and Bruce retain a keen interest in its thematic direction.

To manage COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, the series pivoted in 2020 from an in-person Canberra-based event to a worldwide digital series, while retaining its focus on Australian architects. Today, it continues to provide a window into some of the most highly considered architectural projects by Australian architects, and to tackle the bigger questions of what constitutes good design, why good design is important, the importance and recognition of Country, and the future of our cities. Past series speakers include Paul Pholeros, Alec Tzannes, Glenn Murcutt, Rachel Neeson and Kerstin Thompson.

The vision and enduring commitment of Catherine and Bruce Townsend, Dominic Pelle and Nathan Judd, which is embodied in this series, is to be applauded for raising the profile of architecture and design with audiences in Australia and globally.

(JURY)

Shannon Battisson FRAIA (Chair) – National President,
Australian Institute of Architects | The Mill: Architecture and Design

(PAULA WHITMAN LEADERSHIP IN GENDER EQUITY PRIZE)

Emma Williamson

Established in 2017, the Paula Whitman Leadership in Gender Equity Prize is awarded to a person who has demonstrated exceptional leadership and made an outstanding contribution to the advancement of gender equity in architectural practice, education and governance. It is awarded in 2023 to Emma Williamson, whose contribution to our profession embodies the very definition of the prize.

Throughout her career, Williamson has advocated for gender equity and diversity, educating the profession on our ethical responsibilities and moral obligations. She has also demonstrated the value of this advocacy through a more relevant model of practice that builds on these core values.

Williamson's reflections on the imbalance and inequities apparent on social and business fronts have resonated both inside and outside of our profession. At the same time, they have empowered an intergenerational discourse that encourages equity in all aspects of what we do.

Leadership requires the strength to point out the obvious (often through personal experience). Building upon Paula Whitman's legacy, Williamson has exhibited the courage to reflect on the imbalance that has occurred and the conviction to ensure we advocate for equality.

(JURY)

Tony Giannone LFRAIA – Immediate Past President,
Australian Institute of Architects | Tectvs

Tiffany Liew RAIA – EmAGN President,
Australian Institute of Architects | Andrew Burns Architecture

Nicole Mesquita-Mendes – SONA President,
Australian Institute of Architects

Marika Neustupny FRAIA – National Committee for Gender Equity,
Co-Chair | NMBW Architecture Studio

Julie Willis, Associate RAIA – Parlour representative | University of Melbourne

(LEADERSHIP IN SUSTAINABILITY PRIZE)

Iris Se Young Hwang

The 2023 Leadership in Sustainability Prize is awarded to Iris Se Young Hwang, who has committed her career to thought leadership, research and education, including a dedication to allowing engineering to enhance design rather than to dictate it. Hwang's contribution to sustainability in the built fabric of our megacities is undeniable, with her influence extending not only across international cities but also across environmental design disciplines.

Hwang has demonstrated innovation in multiple areas, including in the development of a waste-management strategy for Seoul, the design of a green building assessment tool currently being used in Hong Kong, and the implementation of incentives that attempt to effect mass change and inspire further research. She takes the knowledge and experience gained through her work into other professions and into the education of future generations, which speaks to her greater goal of giving back to society.

"Architects should have fundamental understandings of all aspects of building, including engineering and sustainability, in order to push the boundary and establish collaborative partnerships with engineers, rather than engineering being sidelined in the creative process of architecture," said Alec Tzannes, one of Hwang's early teachers and mentors. Clearly, Hwang has not only heard these words, but executed them with commendable success and impact.

(JURY)

Shannon Battisson FRAIA (Chair) – National President,
Australian Institute of Architects | The Mill: Architecture and Design

Paul Memmott LFRAIA – The University of Queensland

Andrew Pickard – Powerhaus Engineering

Sarah Lebner RAIA – Cooee Architecture

(NEVILLE QUARRY ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION PRIZE)

Michael Mossman

Michael Mossman, a Kuku Yalanji man from Far North Queensland, is an outstanding practitioner, teacher and leader whose exemplary commitment to architectural education is of great benefit to students, practitioners and the profession.

As Associate Dean Indigenous at the University of Sydney's School of Architecture, Design and Planning, Mossman is committed to Indigenizing the architectural curriculum within the university as well as on a broader national platform through the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia. His extensive interactions and collaborations with colleagues and community representatives are contributing substantially to the architectural education landscape in a critical and expansive manner.

Mossman's exploration of the intersections between cultures via design discourse is fresh and invigorating, brings density to the educational conversation and offers Australian society a deeper and more authentic understanding of belonging and relationship to home. Through intensive interactions, his students learn to walk with community in a first-hand, engaged practice; this genuine, collaborative and immersive approach opens them to a dynamic and participatory way of learning on Country. Mossman's engrossing and inclusive attitude allows for cross-fertilization between students, community and the institution.

By identifying First Nations cultural considerations as an agent for structural change within our profession, Mossman is fundamentally shifting awareness in design thinking in architecture and placemaking. His work is invaluable to the profession and to ensuring that future Australian architects are educated in a way that considers our influence on, and responsibility to, place.

(JURY)

Shannon Battisson FRAIA (Chair) – National President,
Australian Institute of Architects | The Mill: Architecture and Design

John Doyle – AASA President | RMIT University

Lisa Moore FRAIA – Chair of National Education Committee (2020–2023)
| And Architecture

Stuart Tanner FRAIA – National President Elect,
Australian Institute of Architects| Tanner Architects

Nicole Mesquita-Mendes – SONA President, Australian Institute of Architects

(BLUESCOPE GLENN MURCUTT STUDENT PRIZE)

Rhiannon Brownbill

The 2023 Bluescope Glenn Murcutt Student Prize is awarded to Rhiannon Brownbill for her project Burudi Gurad, Burudi Ora (Healthy Country, Healthy People), which captivated the jury intellectually and emotionally. Drawn from engagement with Aboriginal Elders and an Aboriginal Knowledge Keepers Circle, it challenges the protocols of healthcare framed by Western medicine, exploring instead how people might work, live and heal with Country.

Situated on Me-Mel island in Sydney Harbour and cultivating a rich understanding of place, the project not only respects but actively engages with the natural environment. Its singular architectural form acknowledges traditional structures but resists sentimentality to provide a confident, contemporary response to the brief. The arrangement of treatment rooms nimbly balances the technical requirements and human needs of care. Local materials and building techniques are deployed with appropriateness and skill, and an awareness of embodied cultural memory. The project's lightweight and permeable language understands the site's flora and fauna as active participants in its architectural life.

It is impossible to remain an impassive observer when confronted by the technical drawings developed to describe this project; they effortlessly communicate the precision and richness of thinking that underpins all aspects of its conception and development.

The jury is delighted that Brownbill is currently working with the health sector to explore how the findings of the project could transform contemporary practice.

(JURY)

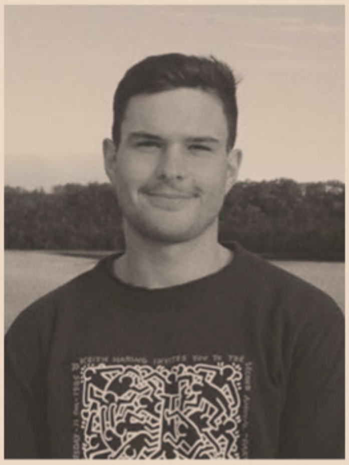
Laura Harding Associate RAIA (Chair) – Hill Thalis Architecture and Urban Projects

Shannon Battisson FRAIA (Chair) – National President,
Australian Institute of Architects | The Mill: Architecture and Design

Nicole Mesquita-Mendes – SONA President,
Australian Institute of Architects

(STUDENT PRIZE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ARCHITECTURE)

Blake Hillebrand



The importance of social engagement for architecture students during the challenging time surrounding COVID is highlighted by Blake Hillebrand's breadth of activities. Hillebrand's initiatives have helped to foster a strong, positive and engaged student culture by bringing together students from architecture schools across Victoria. Through his involvement with SONA and as president of RMIT's architecture student collective RASCOL, he has instigated and managed multiple events over the past year with passion and enthusiasm. He has sought out opportunities across a variety of domains to provide student learning and mentorship, competitions and celebrations in ways that are creative, collaborative, informative and joyful.

With a palpable spirit of generosity, Hillebrand has worked to bring architecture students together and, in doing so, has provided much-needed connection and support during a difficult time. His sense of care, consideration for others and desire to give back have contributed significantly to the important work of building a social and sustainable community.

(JURY)

Shannon Battisson FRAIA (Chair) – National President, Australian Institute of Architects | The Mill: Architecture and Design

Lisa Moore FRAIA – Chair of National Education Committee (2020–2023) | And Architecture

Nicole Mesquita-Mendes – SONA President, Australian Institute of Architects

Jefa Greenaway RAIA – The University of Melbourne

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(JURY CHAIR OVERVIEW)

Dulux Study Tour

(JURY)

Shannon Battisson FRAIA (Chair) – National President,
Australian Institute of Architects | The Mill: Architecture and Design

Jevan Dickinson – General Manager, Dulux Trade, Dulux

Barry Whitmore – Interim CEO, Australian Institute of Architects

Pete Wood – National Commercial Business Manager, Dulux

Qianyi Lim RAIA – Past Dulux Study Tour Recipient | Sibling Architecture

Erin Crowden RAIA – Immediate Past EmAGN President | Proske Architects

The Australian Institute of Architects is pleased to announce that Edwina Brisbane, Sarah Lebner, Bradley Kerr, Ellen Buttrose and Tiffany Liew have been selected to join the 2023 Australian Institute of Architects Dulux Study Tour. We congratulate all for their success from an outstanding field of applicants. The jury was impressed by the depth of skill, talent, passion and dedication to the architectural profession exhibited by all who submitted and strongly encourages those eligible members not successful this year to apply in the future.

The Australian Institute of Architects Dulux Study Tour is one of our most coveted awards. It acknowledges early-career architects for their individual achievements and contribution to architectural practice, education, design excellence and community involvement. Giving our most promising practitioners the opportunity to experience international architecture first-hand, the prize has been running since 2008. The diversity of backgrounds and interests evident in this year’s submissions demonstrates a shifting dynamic within the next generation of the profession.

We thank Dulux for its continuing generous support.

(DULUX STUDY TOUR WINNER)

Ellen Buttrose

Ellen Buttrose is an associate with POD (People Oriented Design) in Cairns, working across the diverse climates and cultures of Queensland and the Torres Strait. Her practice has been shaped by the unique and varied histories, identities, cultures, climates, seasons and landscapes of the regions in which she has lived and practised. Upon graduating from high school, she volunteered in construction in Madagascar with non-government organization Azafady before completing her bachelor and master degrees in architectural studies at the University of South Australia.

Buttrose is a registered architect in Queensland and Victoria, with experience in practices across South Australia, Victoria and Queensland. Her experience includes work on the Gindaja Treatment and Healing Centre, Yarrabah, and the Umpi Korumba First Nations social housing project, Zillmere (both in Queensland); employment in the Office for Design and Architecture South Australia (ODASA); and civic, institutional and cultural practice with Six Degrees Architects in Melbourne. Buttrose sits on the Sustainability Committee for the Queensland Chapter of the Australian Institute of Architects and was the recipient of the Queensland Emerging Architect Prize in 2020.

(DULUX STUDY TOUR WINNER)

Bradley Kerr

Bradley Kerr, a Quandamooka man working on Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, studied at the University of Canberra and the University of Queensland before establishing his career in Melbourne, where he has developed a genuine passion for understanding how people respond to the built environment.

For more than eight years, he worked with FJMT, where he made a significant contribution across the studio through his sense of collaboration, his dedication to design excellence, and his commitment to producing work of the highest cultural and ethical values. This philosophy has only strengthened during his time with Kennedy Nolan Architects, where he has further refined his skill as a senior project architect with a strong design focus. He is now branching out to establish his own practice, Winsor Kerr.

An active member of the architectural community, Kerr has participated generously through roles on the Institute’s First Nations Advisory Working Group, the Australian Accreditation Standing Panel and awards juries, as well as writing for *Architecture Australia* on the topic of Indigenizing practice.

(DULUX STUDY TOUR WINNER)

Tiffany Liew

An associate at Andrew Burns Architecture, Tiffany Liew completed her degree with honours at the University of Sydney, and has worked in a number of firms across a variety of project types. A recipient of many awards and accolades throughout her career to date, Liew continually strives for achievement, balance and new opportunities.

Liew's dedication to the wider architectural community is evidenced through her involvement in all aspects of practice, including research, talks, editorial writing, exhibitions, jury contributions and sessional teaching roles at UTS and the University of Sydney. With her infectious personality, she encourages others to become involved in the wider profession.

In her role as national president of EmAGN, Liew has worked collaboratively to introduce new initiatives for the betterment of graduates and recently registered architects, with a focus on acknowledgement, equity and supported parental programs.

(DULUX STUDY TOUR WINNER)

Edwina Brisbane

Edwina Brisbane has established a consistent and dedicated commitment to design excellence through practice, education and community. Having built up a diverse portfolio of project experience, from hands-on crafting and building to large-scale commercial projects, she now leads Cumulus's Melbourne studio, where she is expanding her role into business development, and as a mentor and leader. As an architectural educator, she has led various design studios at the University of Melbourne and Monash University.

Brisbane's contribution to the architectural and design community is prolific. Her ongoing engagement with the Australian Institute of Architects through various roles with EmAGN and, more recently, as an awards juror – including as chair for the sustainability category in the 2022 Victorian Chapter awards – demonstrates her dedication to the profession. Further, she has worked to expand architectural and design discourse beyond the immediate professional community through her facilitation of events such as Process and the Better Living Forum.

(DULUX STUDY TOUR WINNER)

Sarah Lebner

A director at the newly established practice Cooee Architecture in rural New South Wales, Sarah Lebner has made a huge contribution to the architectural profession in Canberra and beyond. Through her previous role as principal architect at multidisciplinary firm Light House Architecture and Science, she worked to educate both clients and the wider public on the benefits of good design and quality building.

Lebner was awarded the Institute's Emerging Architect Prize in 2020, in recognition of the support she has offered the next generation of architects through her national platform and mentoring scheme *My First Architecture Job*. Her dedication to this work has only continued to grow, and her book, *101 Things I Didn't Learn in Architecture School (and wish I'd known before my first job)* is an invaluable resource for those starting out in practice.

She has contributed widely to the profession through various roles with the Institute, including as a SONA representative, and a member of EmAGN, the Practice Committee and the ACT Chapter Council.

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2023 Gold Medallist

Kerstin Thompson

Since Kerstin Thompson began practising in the 1990s, her built works and advocacy have quietly but radically changed the way we think about heritage, landscape and the whole business of design.

Clarity and serendipity: Negotiating the in-between

(WRITER) Justine Clark

Just as Kerstin Thompson Architects' built projects revolve around interstitial spaces, Thompson's cultural contributions have influenced "the grey zones of invention and possibility," countering myths and opening up spaces for discussion.

Early in 2001, Kerstin Thompson presented the work of Kerstin Thompson Architects (KTA) at a public lecture at the University of Melbourne under the title "Gradient architectures." She spoke eloquently of the practice's interest in the in-between and the interstitial; of "building the moments between opposites"; of incremental change, visible seams and stepped calibration; of an architecture "activated through occupation."

Recently arrived in Australia, I sat in that darkened theatre, entranced. The glowing images showed a compelling body of work, but what really captured my attention was the rigour and care of the discussion. This framed the work, seeping into and around the projects shown and promising much more. This was not theory twisted out of shape to justify form-making. Here was the post-structuralism that had informed the architectural education of our generation used intelligently to underpin strategies for architectural thinking and acting, and ways of being in the world.

As the new assistant editor at *Architecture Australia*, I asked Kerstin if we could publish the talk – and convinced my boss that it was important.[1] Over the following decades, I have watched her career flourish. I have enjoyed thoughtful conversations about work and practice, and I have observed and benefited from her generous contribution to architecture's public and professional cultures. Kerstin has continued the commitment to the interstitial, cultivating the messy, uncertain and fascinating spaces between and beyond binary opposites. This has proved to be incredibly fertile ground. These days, Kerstin is more likely to talk of "grey zones" and "spectrums of change" than gradients, but the clarity of thought and strategic framework that held so much promise have been realized in a rich body of work – built projects, speculative schemes, modes of practice and education, events, exhibitions, talks, writing and advocacy in the public and professional realms.

Kerstin's work is distinguished by an interest in strategy and typology, combined with a fascination with everyday habits and happenings. There is a desire to create places that are both transformed and brought to life by those who inhabit them. In design terms, the interest in the in-between manifests in the exploration of interval buildings, in loose residential plans, in works that entwine building and landscape, in spaces that are at once public and private, in projects that embed the significance of heritage within the "informality of the everyday" – to name just a few.

On the occasion of the Gold Medal, others are also writing about KTA's design work and built projects. I have been invited to reflect on Kerstin's extensive contribution to architectural culture. It is worth noting, however, that these worlds are not discrete. They also inhabit a continuum. Design work, advocacy and cultural contributions overlap, intersect and entwine. Each draws on and informs the others; all are undertaken with intellectual curiosity and rigour.

Kerstin's professional advocacy and cultural contribution are also characterized by an awareness of the constrictions of binary thinking and an exploration of the grey zones as places of invention and possibility. Part of this involves countering the myths that have long structured architecture. At the core of these is the hoary old heroic genius model of architectural practice, replete with arrogance and delusions of grandeur, poor communication, long hours and miserable underlings. This is, of course, the subject of decades of critique, but it is remarkably persistent – and underwrites the tedious cliché that high-quality design is incompatible with good business practices.

Kerstin has no time for these old myths, recognizing that they are at the heart of many of the current problems of the profession. They are also boring. There is no new insight to be found here, no space for invention, no joy. Sometimes she tackles these myths overtly – as in her 2019 address to the Association of Consulting Architects (ACA), "The business of design." She declared: "We maintain that the quality of this design practice is indelibly linked to quality of business practice, health of workplace, thriving people and business. The way we do architecture as business and process can and should be as high quality as the much applauded, awarded and enjoyed output itself."[2] More often, she circumvents the myths, taking us to more interesting territory, generously sharing experiences and knowledge, and making space for others to do likewise.

Kerstin has spoken often about the decision to establish her own practice, and the fact that this was driven in part by a desire to find ways to produce outstanding work that was not predicated on working absurd hours. This has been an ongoing project, and KTA has adapted over time as circumstances have changed and in response to experiences gained. When I first met Kerstin two decades ago, she was experimenting with "builders' hours" – starting early, in the quiet before the phones started ringing, and finishing in time to be available for her young child after school. By 2019, when she presented "The business of architecture," KTA was a team of 30. Speaking of the value of design, Kerstin spoke of the importance of a clear, shared understanding of design intent, accessible to and embraced by all involved in the project. This enables timely decision-making and dispersed responsibility, and it aligns design quality with financial matters. Importantly, this notion of intent also allows space for negotiation – the delicate balance of adapting to changing circumstances while maintaining the project's core attributes, without which the value offered through the design would be diminished.

Publicly sharing such internal processes – including acknowledging that they are not always smooth or easy – is an important form of advocacy within the profession. It opens up space for discussion about aspects that too often go unmentioned. It reminds us that the habits of practice are part of the culture of the profession. They are not a-historical or a-theoretical (indeed, the KTA approach to design intent sounds rather similar to that pursued by John Andrews International, decades earlier). They can – and should – also be a space of invention and consideration. The myths can be renegotiated and remade.

Advocacy of this type occurs through public talks and writing, but also in the ways the practice chooses to present itself to the broader public. For example, the KTA contribution to the 2009 exhibition Portraits plus Architecture, at the National Portrait Gallery, presented images of the practice in action. On site, in the office, architecture was shown as a place of work, encounter and exchange.

In that talk to the ACA, Kerstin also pointed out that good design is, itself, a form of advocacy. But she knows that it is naïve to imagine that the quality of the work speaks for itself; communicating the value of design and the contribution it makes is essential. Kerstin is an articulate and compelling speaker. She uses language carefully, with skill and beauty. She invites her audience in, locating ideas and framing projects in ways that are sophisticated, accessible and meaningful to those listening. She explains project drivers (bringing us back to that idea of project intent), not her wishes or her will. She also recognizes that public talks are just one way to demonstrate the value of design. How one conducts oneself in more ordinary contexts is equally or perhaps more important – "everyday presentations to our clients, authorities, planners and so on are also forums for challenging and changing the terms, the outcome, the context, expectations of architecture as advocacy for improved design outcomes."[3]

Most importantly, it is essential to stand up and speak out. The commitment to the in-between, to negotiation and accommodation, should not be confused with dithering or acquiescence: "So when a contract, competition or regulation strikes you as unfair, unreasonable, not in the interests of our profession and more broadly the public or civic interest, then speak up, agitate, reject and negotiate for a better outcome." Kerstin is not afraid to say what she thinks.

Opening up space for discussion among others is also an important aspect of Kerstin's contribution. In 2005, she was creative director of the Australian Institute of Architects' national conference, themed *Exchange*. To my mind, this remains one of the most successful conferences to date, due in large part to the highly considered framing that balanced clarity of intent with the serendipity of the moment. Speakers were carefully briefed, with session themes posed as questions, then invited to participate within a structure that promoted conversation, not pontification or posturing. As Kerstin reflected after the conference: "By placing this informal exchange between peers in the foreground, the audience was able to enjoy the vicarious pleasure of watching the unexpected unfold. We experienced the excitement and associated anticipation of the unpredictable, spontaneous and sometimes wayward tangents and trajectories that the most interesting and compelling conversation inevitably takes."[4]

Kerstin's work as an educator runs throughout her career. She began teaching at RMIT in 1990 and credits this as providing the context for examining what it means to be a critical or reflective practitioner. Her teaching is a further challenge to those old mythologies as she seeks to shift emphasis from the architect as sole author to a "much more negotiated practice," as she explained in an interview in 2016. "The point … was to teach an appreciation for non-static context, which I think is in every way what practice is like every day. It's contingent, you're constantly getting thrown curve balls, and it's how you negotiate and manage that and what you can extract out of it. I think that's how good buildings come about. That's a very valuable skill to have."[5] Teaching is also a way to focus the attention of future generations on the topics that matter. As a professor at Victoria University of Wellington, she set an agenda around housing, encouraging a strategic approach that helped equip students with the knowledge and skills to advocate for and tackle higher-density housing – a commitment that is also manifest in her own built work, competition entries and public advocacy.

All of this engagement beyond the office is a generous contribution to professional and public culture, but it is also imbricated with the world of the practice. Kerstin describes these contributions as a way to make space for thinking beyond the "cut and thrust" of the project, a chance to "step outside and see the wood for the trees." These activities help make space for the development of ideas that then reverberate between these various worlds. Negotiating these many and varied in-betweens is a means to grasp the richness and complexity that our profession has to offer, and to contribute with rigour and intelligence.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge one more piece of messy, complicated territory that Kerstin navigates with aplomb: that of gender. For a long time, she was one of the few women in Australian architecture running a practice with her name on the door. Like almost everyone, Kerstin wishes to be recognized for the quality of her work and the value of her contribution, not the fact of her gender. Nonetheless, she understands that gender-based assumptions suffuse society, including "the language and concepts that frame and describe architecture." These have the potential to impact the reception of work, the attitudes of clients and consultants, the expectations placed on professionals and the roles available to them, the assumptions about who does the "caring" work within practices and the profession, and the ease with which people attain and assume positions of authority. In sharing practical strategies, Kerstin returns again to the post-structuralist rethinking of binary oppositions.[6] This is, of course, a feminist approach, learned from Liz Grosz, the great Australian cultural theorist with whom Kerstin was lucky enough to study in the late Eighties. Kerstin describes this early training as providing "the beginning of a language for thinking about architecture and space that released me from some of the things that I struggled with in discussions around buildings and how they are imagined and revered and feared."[7] The development of Kerstin's career is a remarkable fulfilment of this potential, revealing the power and promise of sophisticated feminist practices in the hands of an intelligent, rigorous and talented architect.

(PREVIOUS) Kerstin Thompson, 2023.
Photograph: Jessica Lindsay.

(ABOVE) Portrait of Kerstin Thompson Architects
by Luis Ferreiro for Portraits plus Architecture,
National Portrait Gallery, 2009.

— Justine Clark is an architectural editor, writer, critic and researcher. She is co-founder and director of *Parlour: gender, equity, architecture* and a former editor of *Architecture Australia*.

(FOOTNOTES)

(1) Kerstin Thompson, "Gradient architectures," *Architecture Australia*, vol. 90, no. 3, May/Jun 2001, 66–71.

(2) Kerstin Thompson, "The business of design," based on a presentation to the Association of Consulting Architects – South Australia on 27 August 2019, available at aca.org.au/the-business-of-design.

(3) Kerstin Thompson, "The business of design," 2019.

(4) Kerstin Thompson, "Exchanges," *Architecture Australia*, vol. 94, no. 4, Jul/Aug 2005, 83–96, architectureau.com/articles/exchanges.

(5) Kerstin Thompson, "Negotiating form: Q+A with Kerstin Thompson (Part 2)," interview by Michael Smith and Sonia Sarangi, *The Red and Black Architect*, 13 November 2016, theredandblackarchitect.wordpress.com/2016/11/13/negotiating-form-qa-with-kerstin-thompson-part-2.

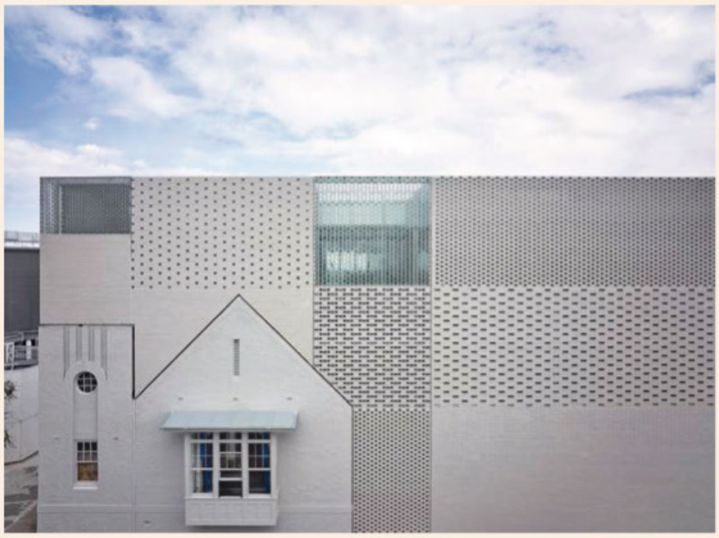
(6) Kerstin Thompson, "10 lessons," *Parlour*, 14 March 2014, parlour.org.au/workplace/career-paths/10-lessons. This is an edited version of a talk presented at the 2013 Diverse Practice Symposium at Victoria University of Wellington.

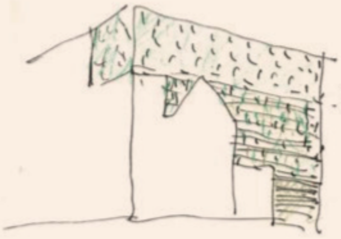
(7) Kerstin Thompson and Marie-Louise Richards [in conversation], "The profession through a feminist lens," *Parlour*, 15 November 2021, parlour.org.au/parlour-reading-room/the-profession-through-a-feminist-lens.

Context and connection: Responding to circumstance

(WRITER) Conrad Hamann

Thompson's inventive response to context and circumstance has led to designs in which historical leads recur, "bold and frank, but new and recast," to compose a major episode in Australian architecture.





(LEFT AND BELOW) Melbourne Holocaust Museum (2022).
Photograph: Derek Swalwell.
Sketch: Kerstin Thompson.

Architecture's context – social, physical and historical – is revealed most vitally not through correct stylistic exemplars or earlier ideas enacted as gospel, but through many different connections. In Kerstin Thompson's architecture and that of her firm Kerstin Thompson Architects (KTA), established in 1994, these connections have life and vigour as they work through and shape each project. Thompson's response to and endlessly inventive use of context is surely a major reason for her Gold Medal. The context varies constantly, but KTA's way of engaging it follows common themes. The work, eloquent in architectural expression, forms a major episode in Australian architecture. At the same time, Thompson and her office have stepped right away from the habitual public heroism of modern architecture's Australian experience. KTA's work is marked throughout by its gentleness in countenance. This comes most markedly in the modulation of transparency – "literal and phenomenal," as Colin Rowe and Robert Slutsky once explained it.[1] Inside the boundary wall, Thompson's architecture embraces form in themes: they include the *great circle*, the *thread* and the most detailed response to *circumstance*.

How does this varied transparency work? In Melbourne's north-eastern suburbs, Warrandyte Police Station (2007) changes its personality like lightning: domestic to the street front, around the corner it becomes a castle with scanning eyes and a small oriel window. In Marysville Police Station (2012) in regional Victoria, in a strange landscape partly regrown after bushfire destruction, the street-wall transparency changes over a long elevation, with sticks of timber recalling life and landscape before the fire.

Melbourne Holocaust Museum (2022), decisively inner-urban and using an existing building, is conspicuous in its symbolic revelation and shrouding. It begins by showing part of its interior though glazing, then veils it in brick grilles, and moves finally to a jewel-like scatter of glass bricks embedded in an otherwise opaque wall. These points of light are now too small and dispersed to show the interior, but they evoke something of Old Vienna's glittering jewellery-architecture and Kristallnacht's shards on hard pavement in 1938. Embedded in an inter-war Melbourne building, they are from the same period but geographically far away, veiled in a dark-cloud grey.

This varied transparency–permeability is also seen in earlier KTA designs, including the expansive House at Lake Connewarre (2002) near Geelong. It commands its low ridge like the great Prairie School houses, but the stretches of everyday materials between gradual material changes or small shifts in structure belie Wrightian heroisms altogether. In KTA's architecture, commonplace materials are used in broad sweeps as a connective fabric to link moments within each building, and then to link out to the surroundings and the world beyond.

KTA designs recall those of the American architect Charles Moore: buildings within a building, stage imagery in floor planes, spaces linked by episodic motifs – textures, glass placement and joinery. Moore is in such critical exile nowadays that we forget how central he was in changing Australian architecture from the mid-1960s into the late 1980s. Besides KTA, only Edmond and Corrigan, Greg Burgess and Peter Elliott (all Gold Medal winners), Peter Williams and Gary Boag have really sustained and used his legacies in Victoria's buildings. As with other KTA affinities (Venturi and Scott Brown, Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates), this general link is with the regionalist phase of America's, Italy's and Northern Europe's architectural pluralism. It is only one part of KTA's whole architecture, but it has particular value in contextual design, generating a sense of immediate response: the centrality of *circumstance* and physical moment.

Thompson also reconciles Italian and European rationalist architecture through inflections of her Milanese experience – while she was studying in 1987, she worked in Matteo Thun's office. (Behind Thun sit Ettore Sottsass, Superstudio and others from Italy's kaleidoscopic 1960s.) She recalls Thun's value for her then, especially as a designer, and how the work of leading Italian architects impressed her, particularly because it so often spanned industrial, furniture, fashion and household designs. KTA's brick grilles, colouration and texture suggest another Italian presence: Luigi Caccia Dominioni, so clearly admired here by Roy Grounds. She found gradations of success and disappointment in modernist, neoliberal and rationalist Italy and recalls her disappointment in seeing Aldo Rossi's Gallaratese housing in fog, when it lost its de Chirico colouring and, by implication, the sunlit clarity of Rossi's concept renderings.

Alterations, additions and refurbishments have been crucial in Australian architecture, though they hardly figure in our general histories. Thompson sustains this engagement, from her South Melbourne House (1999) and Fitzroy Warehouse (2002) to the recent Broadmeadows Town Hall (2019) and Bundanon Art Museum and Bridge (2021). KTA affirms the value of older structures and surroundings – themselves often already altered and "impure" – if they assist contemporary purpose. More than this, these buildings reflect the basis of the most exciting Australian architecture. In recent years, few have sensed the potential of responding to local conditions and circumstance better than Kai Chen, who has been something of a mentor for Thompson since she worked for Chen and Ian Robinson (1988–1989). She still talks regularly with Chen and recalls how her time with Robinson Chen focused her practice priorities in several ways.

KTA delights in the inherent discords of each building's program and outcome, with every new project asserting a "body politic," as Alex Selenitsch said of Edmond and Corrigan's work.[2] That armature certainly informed Peter Corrigan's 2003 Gold Medal. When adding or altering, Greg Burgess (2004 Gold Medallist) takes the historical forms within existing buildings and combines them with his own additions in an interlocking geometry of rhythm and transformation; his buildings demonstrate internal debate, a difficult unity by agreement rather than homogeneity. Peter Elliott (Gold 2017 Gold Medallist) has built an architecture on *threads*, winding through one existing fabric after another, embracing the diversity of each project's neighbours. These practitioners generate narrative in their work – a sense of architecture as an unfolding series of engagements, encounters, physical transformations, with infinite patterns of linkage, whether from recollection or axes. Thompson's affinity is with all three architects in this sense.

As in Edmond and Corrigan, threads are also evident in the way KTA's works recollect a powerful form in the surrounding region. At Bundanon, the New South Wales estate bequeathed by Arthur and Yvonne Boyd, KTA's long trestle Bridge recalls great structures on the winding paths toward Bundanon from Melbourne: the long timber railway trestles at Orbost and Nowa Nowa and the curving high bridge at Bullioh, or in New South Wales the railway trestle at Gundagai and Nowra's truss road bridge. Just as the Shoalhaven hills are framed through KTA's Bridge, at Hallam Bypass (2003) near Melbourne, a freeway screen becomes a similar frame – an abstracting lens, almost, for the patterns and stepped shapes of the surrounding suburban housing.

Threads are everywhere in KTA buildings. Some are forms: stairs and bookshelves become a tissue that runs through any number of shapes and spaces, physically clear of them yet, in reiterated colour or texture, linking spaces one to another, affirming each internal area as an episode in an unfolding narrative. Some are at radically differing scales, enacting observations Thompson made on Carlo Scarpa's scale variance in a 1999 essay:[3] see the bare stud frames throughout her refurbishment of Deakin University's School of Architecture and Built Environment (2016). Other times – Marysville Police Station, House at Lake Connewarre, Tarrawarra Cellar Door (2016) – the thread becomes interior space cast as a long road, suggesting Le Corbusier's later pilgrimage paths or John Hejduk's almighty walls; at Bundanon, this is taken outdoors.

Great circles, from tree outlines on ground plans to Lutyens' 1900 Tigbourne Court legacy of scoops or a central void-circle, act variously as unifiers, dividers and partial screens – as they do in the renowned Toorak house that Roy Grounds (1968 Gold Medallist) designed for himself. Witness Thompson's Fitzroy Warehouse conversion (2002), the courtyard housing collaboration with James Stockwell Architects (Church on Napier, 2019), and Northcote High School's Performing Arts and VCE Centre or Broadmeadows Town Hall (both 2019), where the figure is swung up onto the walls in great Kahnian circles. At Thompson's stables-to-studios conversion for the Victorian College of the Arts (2018), the great circle is a sun-filled octagonal well beneath a radial web of beams and rafters. In other projects, the circle and courtyard become sliver spaces with steep, road-merging angles, as in the houses at Lake Connewarre and Hanging Rock (2014). They recall the central, stage-like yard spaces of Edmond and Corrigan's Athan House (1988), or Charles Moore's Swan House in New York (1976). Through her Ivanhoe House (2008), Thompson speaks her admiration for Alvar Aalto (in particular, his Muuratsalo Experimental House, 1953) distinctly. But Australia's own Harold Desbrowe-Annear is there as well, in the varied transparency and permeability of his three Eaglemont houses (1903) a few kilometres away. There, each circle is caught in rotation, turning balconies and verandahs into screens pulled over or drawn back, behind swooping arcs of art nouveau newels and balustrading.

Historical leads recur in all of Thompson's work, bold and frank, but new and recast significantly. To thread sources one could add Scarpa's whispered presence, as in Northcote High School's additions. Also Robin Boyd (Gold Medallist 1969): his accounts of architectural change are both a revelation and a lead weight for historians, but his spatial ideas, as in his stepped-level hillside houses, are given new life and transformation in Thompson designs: the House at Hanging Rock, for example. The spaces and cable roof of Boyd's own Walsh Street House (1957) appear in Thompson's Park House (2016).

Varied historical sourcing looms in this commentary because Thompson truly senses its value as principle, digests it and casts it as something new. The affective context is often at some physical distance, but it is remembered – as the disused railway trestles that breathe again through Bundanon's Bridge. So often in KTA work, contexts and recall are not always the "right" ones, not the usual architectural sources, not immediately correct and masterly in their interplay. But KTA engages them – in all their textured and often accidental richness – with a remarkable sense of encounter in the moment, and with surprise, delight and a sense of unexpected value. In so doing, all KTA designs offer a new combination of references, varying transparency, working through design in paths of great circles, framing visual narrative with threading. All these responses, and their actions, engage a real if neglected aspect of Australia: even within settler society's legacy, we have an architectural culture and a lode of architectural history now shared by 26.4 million people. Australia's is a society and architecture of teeming complexity and promise.

— Conrad Hamann is an associate professor in the history of architecture and urban form at RMIT University. The author of five books and many essays and commentaries, he wrote the catalogue essay for Australia's exhibition at the 2008 Venice Architecture Biennale with Kerstin Thompson.

(FOOTNOTES)

(1) Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, "Transparency: Literal and phenomenal," *Perspecta*, vol. 8, 1963, 45–54; doi.org/10.2307/1566901.

(2) Alex Selenitsch, "The body politic: Two houses by Edmond and Corrigan," *Transition*, 22/3, Summer 1987, 52–55.

(3) Kerstin Thompson, "Detail in the work of Guilford Bell: A problem of evidence," in Leon van Schaik (ed.), *Bell: The Life and Work of Guilford Bell, Architect 1912–1992* (Melbourne: Bookman Press, 1999).

Context and connection: Selected projects

"You have to see what you can be" rings true for me. Female-led architecture practices were few and far between when I first met Kerstin in 1994. I was 18, studying architecture at RMIT. Kerstin critiqued our design studio and was running a small practice.

I admire that Kerstin is never afraid to challenge the status quo in practice, her writing and when advocating for the profession. She is a wonderful mentor and role model for architectural practice. I often ask myself, "What would Kerstin do?"

— Clare Cousins
Director, Clare Cousins Architects

Kerstin first inspired me when I was a student of architecture. As my thesis supervisor, she was perceptive and intentional. She influenced me at pivotal times, like when she organized a tour so I could see great projects and receive feedback on my thesis from key designers whom I would never have had access to otherwise. As my mentor, Kerstin is generous, consistent and accessible. She gave me the courage to apply to Harvard GSD and helped me with my application. She shapes my attitude toward what is possible.

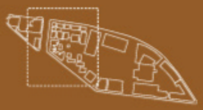
— Elyjana Roach
Architectural designer, CAZA (New York)

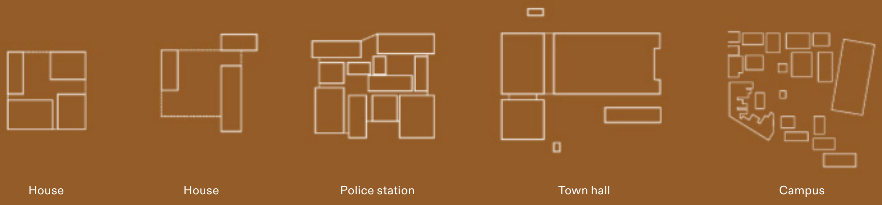
Kerstin Thompson's work is about *space*, not *shape*. It's not about what you look at directly, but about the spaces that are left behind, and their relationships to other spaces, defined through qualities that are felt. In this way, she stands apart from other Melbourne architects and their approach to form and image-making.

What about the Bridge, then? Yes, even the Bridge. It's not so much an object to stand back and behold as an armature for a connection to the landscape, a framework for feeling a place.

This kind of work is hard to convey with the conventional modes of architectural communication. It's quieter, slower, more ambiguous, and humble. All the things architecture today ought to be.

— Rory Hyde
Associate professor in architecture,
University of Melbourne





Clusters diagram

(RIGHT) Campus design for Monash University Law, Business and Economics Complex (shortlisted competition entry with Grimshaw and NMBW, 2012). Many KTA projects are broken down into a cluster of smaller buildings, with connective areas between and around them for loose, unprogrammed space, circulation or gardens. Drawings: KTA.

(OPPOSITE ABOVE) Northcote High School Performing Arts and VCE Centre, Victoria (2019). Photograph: Kerstin Thompson.

(OPPOSITE BELOW) Carrum Downs Police Station, Victoria (2010). Photograph: Derek Swalwell; Sketch: Kerstin Thompson.

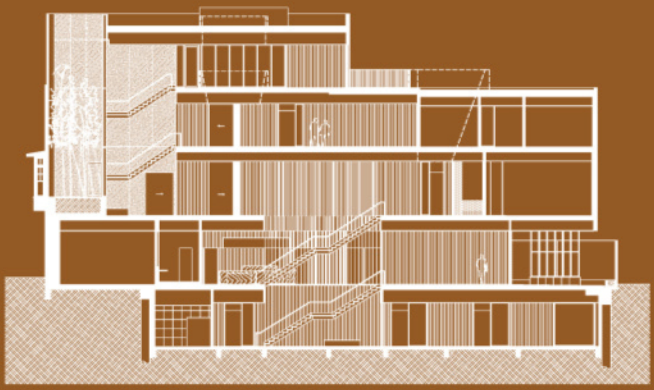
(RIGHT) Melbourne Holocaust Museum, Victoria (2022). Photograph: Derek Swalwell.

(BELOW) Erskine River House, Victoria (2021). Sketch: Kerstin Thompson.

Kerstin and I have been friends since the 1980s, meeting through a mutual friend. I was studying painting at Victoria College, Prahran and she was studying architecture at RMIT. Art, the home and family have generated our conversations. As a friend, she is thoughtful and kind, ordering or making great food while witnessing and celebrating some of our lives' most important moments. I admire her work ethic and gentle directness. As a practitioner, she is thoughtful, informed, detailed and materially focused, with a sense of the bigger picture in which she is working.

We have a shared focus on the Melbourne Holocaust Museum: KTA has designed the building and I have been commissioned to make the Integrated Holocaust Memorial for the precinct outside. The newly designed building is full of light, hope, depth and complexity. Kerstin combines intelligence with a rigour that is pared back, revealing the landscape and engaging with the community that inhabits the spaces she designs.

— Kathy Temin
Artist and professor of fine art
at Monash Art, Design and Architecture



Melbourne Holocaust Museum section
1:500

Main bed
shower
bathm
kit/dig
FP
liv
P-deck
seat

We first met in Hong Kong in 2005, and again soon after, in Tokyo and Cork during the global tour of New Trends of Architecture in Europe and Asia-Pacific, curated by Dominique Perrault and Hiroshi Hara (with input from Álvaro Siza, Fumihiko Maki and Aaron Betsky). New Trends presented the work of future Pritzker laureates RCR Arquitectes and Shigeru Ban, alongside the likes of J. Mayer H., Atelier Bow-Wow, Kengo Kuma and Associates, and KTA. Kerstin and I have met and dined many times since, in Venice and at World Architecture Festivals, most recently in Lisbon last December. My dear old friend never fails to bring the critical voice of Australian architecture to Europe and the world with wit, grace and generosity. Brava, Kerstin!

— Shane O'Toole
Architect and critic, Kilkenny, Ireland

No blank canvas: A companionship between new and old

(WRITER) Stuart Harrison

A layered approach enables Thompson's designs to recognize existing buildings and landscapes, bring in First Nations histories and stories, and operate in a more sustainable manner.

Assertive and respectful, measured but rich – these are ways we can see Kerstin Thompson's work with existing buildings. All of these projects, going back to the mid-1990s, have been guided by a dogged pursuit of what a site and building can do. While Thompson's new building work responds directly to either an urban or a broader landscape, the heritage and re-use work develops a more immediate conversation with what was already there. This relationship between new and old can be seen as a companionship.

To triangulate Thompson's approach to existing buildings and heritage, we can consider three significant projects undertaken by the office in recent years: the Melbourne Holocaust Museum (2022), the Wertheim Factory conversion (2013) and Broadmeadows Town Hall (2019). Spanning public, institutional and commercial typologies, these projects all work in differing ways with existing buildings. Only one of these projects had an effective heritage listing – the former Wertheim piano factory in Richmond, Melbourne.

The approach of layered history is evident at the piano factory, which has now had four distinct uses. Following the original function, it became a biscuit factory before it was, most famously, converted for use by the Channel 9 television studios. Now occupied by dwellings and a cafe, the original 1912 red-brick building has been veiled in parts, revealed in others. Graceful, expanded mesh screens drape over naturally ventilated stairs and corridors to create spaces that are between inside and out (breezeways have been a common thread in all the work). New steel structures and cables allow for vegetation to grow up around them, adding another layer –and also adding greenery.

The most recently completed work is the Melbourne Holocaust Museum in Elsternwick. Here, the clearest rejection of accepted planning and heritage devices is evident – a big "no" to the idea of the setback. Intended as a way of mitigating the "damage" of new work in heritage streetscapes, the setback of new elements, particularly those sitting above existing buildings, is almost universal. Not so here, where Thompson has retained the facade of the existing building (it could have been demolished), absorbing it into a new white cube with zero setback in all directions. The fundamentals of old and new being distinct still hold – but both are also connected, mainly through an absence of colour.

While the old is engulfed, it is still clearly legible – perhaps even more so, thanks to the clear definition of the parapet edge. The new facade is a woven interplay of solid white and glass brick, with elements of hit-and-miss brickwork (a staple of the office) used to bring light inside and register the building's internal organization. This project, like many others, shows a simple, clear system of circulation and connection through the building, and it suggests wider linkages. These are interiors always striving for the outside.

Again and again, we see a strong interest in working with what is already on a site rather than seeking to start anew. What Thompson has understood throughout her career is that there is nothing truly new – no blank canvas. This layered approach not only suits working with existing buildings and existing landscapes and reduces energy – it also creates a framework with which to bring in First Nations histories and stories, and less celebrated histories – uses of buildings between then and now.

When Thompson started practising in the 1990s, the Melbourne scene was dominated by a reference-rich architecture that was expressed formally in the architectural outcomes – often at the expense of endurance, flexibility and amenity. Thompson has been able to do both – to be deeply aware of a place's layered and rich history, and to make references to this and the wider architectural discourse, while also providing enduring outcomes that perform well internally and provide amenity for the people who use them. The glass bricks at the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, for example, recall Kristallnacht; the steel mesh at the Wertheim Factory recalls the era of biscuit canning; and the grand circular opening at Broadmeadows draws from both Roy Grounds' National Gallery of Victoria and, further afield, Louis Kahn.

Throughout Thompson's work, we see heritage being treated as a design problem rather than a conservation problem – this distinguishes the approach from those of others who seek to make the most minimal intervention in a heritage context. In this way, Thompson has stretched away from the Burra Charter, which mostly seeks to do as little as is required – but perhaps further reinforces the key tenet of old and new being different. The Broadmeadows Town Hall is a built demonstration of almost all the conservation strategies the Burra Charter identifies – from careful restoration on its main east facade, to a total reconstruction with new elements at the western end. Upmost at "Broady," however, is *use* – the building's use has not changed; it's still a community facility doing "town hall" business.

Indeed, as Thompson herself has proposed, all of her projects can be measured by how much the use has changed versus how much formal change has occurred. While Broadmeadows is all building change and no change of use, the works at, say, the Sacred Heart Building at Abbotsford Convent (2018) are the opposite – a diverse set of new uses with minimal change to the building (outside of a fine new bridge to allow equal access across the buildings). At the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, the use is also unchanged – the retained building was already part of the museum – but there is a radical change in architectural form and expression. Wertheim Factory is high on both these measures – new uses and new elements that divide internally but open up the site to its context.

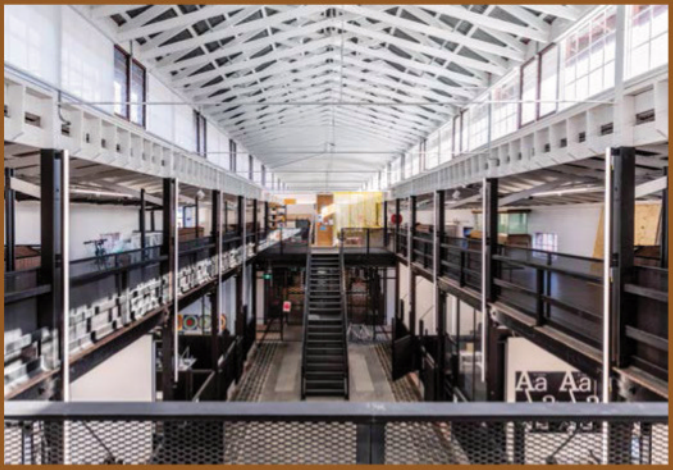
Other areas of Thompson's practice, particularly urban design and landscape, also become ways in which to approach heritage. Queenscliff Community Hub (2022) sits between two heritage buildings, directly connecting to one of them, but also sets up a casual garden plaza in its front setback and suggests an urban link through the site. Heritage and urban design also directly intersect with the recent Queen and Collins project (2021). This major reworking in and around several state-listed heritage buildings in central Melbourne is approached through urban design strategies – how the closed site could be opened up, made more porous. This project also had to deal with another, even more challenging existing building: Peddle Thorp's 1993 ANZ tower, which, its neo-Gothic architectural skin notwithstanding, closed off the site and gave it a corporate edifice. Thompson's project seems to embrace even this – there are notes of the neo-Gothic in the new work.

Much of Thompson's re-use work can be classified as *elective heritage* – where building retention is a choice, not prescribed by heritage controls. She has worked in both traditional controlled heritage and in this elective heritage mode, and this desire to work with the existing – going back decades now – distinguishes her from many others who seek to demolish where possible (less hassle, more fees). Thompson has sought to work with many histories, multiple layers, and to build confidently in and around existing work. It's often beautifully detailed and controlled, but not shy. The work demands to be treated as equal to what it sits in, around, or next to.

— Stuart Harrison is an architect, a specialist in the reuse of buildings, and director of Harrison and White.

(ABOVE)	Wertheim Factory, Melbourne (2013). Photograph: Derek Swalwell.
(BELOW)	Broadmeadows Town Hall, Melbourne (2019). Photograph: Dan Preston.

No blank canvas: Selected projects



Kerstin sets a cracking pace. A ritual walker, she is often spotted taking long, measured strides – a quiet, familiar figure along the streets of Fitzroy and Melbourne.

Paths travelled by Kerstin form metaphorical webs, effected by energy, intellect and warm generosity that is compelling. She is approachable, curious, and engaged in conversations that question and challenge the status quo.

Not averse to criticism and provocation, she remains constructive, optimistic and accountable – focusing on what matters.

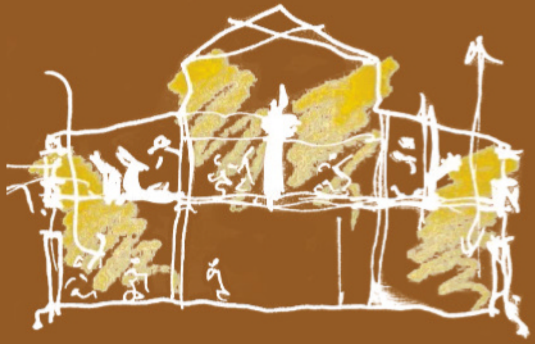
She tenaciously forges broad trails through practice, education, advocacy and representation – driving opportunities reaching far beyond herself.

And while Kerstin walks at speed, she moderates generously – creating space for others to be better seen and heard.

Having worked at KTA for more than two decades collectively, we feel privileged to have crossed paths with Kerstin and to have walked some distance in her company – learning to tread, as she does, with empathy and humility.

— Lynn Chew
Associate principal, KTA

— Michael Archibald
Associate, KTA



(ABOVE AND LEFT) The Stables, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne (2018). Photograph: Trevor Mein; Sketch: Kerstin Thompson.

(BELOW) Private Melbourne Women's Club (2018). Photograph: Derek Swalwell.

I met Kerstin through a mutual friend back in the late seventies. I was lucky at that time, as I worked with a lot of the future stars of Melbourne architecture. Kerstin was one of those.

Having watched Kerstin over time and seen her work mature, I am in complete awe of her calmness, boldness, work ethic, compassion, mindfulness, stubbornness and passion for the project.

The process of collaboration does not scare her; she is happy to share her passion. She has an ability to take her staff and clients on a journey. She listens.

I've seen Kerstin happy, sad, and annoyed, but she is always composed – and in this industry, that is a great attribute. I often think, "Why do we do it?" Kerstin does it because she cares about the project. Each project embodies her.

For Kerstin, I don't think she can get design out of her system.

— Julian Barlow
Founder, Atma Builders

Kerstin joined Robinson Chen the same way most did: she just turned up, found a seat, and started working. I do recollect that she could write (but her handwriting was impossible to decipher), couldn't make models and had no CAD experience. "Kirk" had to find her niche, and this became principally on site – working with our carpenters and other trades to translate the design idea faithfully into the built form. We discovered that she loved site work and the process of problem-solving, refining details, preparing cutting lists, and persuading and placating clients.

The clear connection between Kerstin and Robinson Chen is that Kerstin is a speculative designer, basing each project on an idea, experimenting, and challenging herself each time with a new approach.

The collaborative and complementary Yin-and-Yang that was Ian [Robinson] and me was happily reflected in the team around us. An in-house joke about belonging to either the slightly younger, enigmatic and wise "Snake" group or the older, elegant and quiet team "Rabbit" sums up the camaraderie and sense of coexistence that was part of the practice. I remember Kerstin, along with James Legge and Shelley Penn, at one time being team "Snake."

Ian and I had a policy of encouraging people to leave the studio when we believed they were ready to do it on their own. So, it didn't take long for Kerstin to go solo.

Kerstin has deservedly had wonderful success – the outcome of her own drive and impetus.

— Kai Chen
Director and founding principal, Lovell Chen

Listening is key to a great client relationship. Kerstin Thompson is a deep listener and a true collaborator. In our work together at Bundanon, she turned every challenge into a fresh opportunity for design excellence, marrying our operational needs with truly original outcomes. Kerstin demonstrated great sensitivity toward the site's world-class existing architecture, its iconic landscape and its extraordinary, multi-layered history. The award-winning results speak to her uncompromising determination to deliver an outstanding result, first for the company, and then for the nation.

— Deborah Ely
CEO, Bundanon Trust 2006–2021

(ABOVE) Kerr Street Residences, Victoria (2021). Photograph: Derek Swalwell.

(BELOW) Queen and Collins, Victoria (2021). Photograph: Derek Swalwell.

Kerstin and I got to know each other in the late Eighties, as students doing long, late hours making models in the cauldron of Robinson Chen Architects. She says that I made much better models than her and, considering this latest honour, I'll take the win.

Our friendship continued and, along with Shelley Penn, also at Robinson Chen, we lived in a warehouse in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy and each opened small practices.

In these early years, Kerstin refined her skills in housing while Six Degrees went off exploring the changing liquor-licensing laws in the laneways of Melbourne.

We have remained friends over the years, with our practices developing in quite different directions. Kerstin's determined pursuit of a refined architecture that talks to the qualities of space, light and materiality, and thoughtfully considers program, history and context, means that she has produced a body of work well deserving of this Gold Medal recognition. Congratulations, Kirk!

— James Legge
Director, Six Degrees Architects

Landscape and interconnectivity: Inviting the river in

(WRITER) Louise Wright

As we increasingly recognize the incompatibility of buildings and ecological integrity, Thompson's work offers "deeply convincing guidance" in how we might create physical forms that participate in their sites' ecosystems.

In November 2022, Kerstin Thompson curated a Design Speaks symposium called "A Broader Landscape" alongside Phillip Arnold.[1] The curators asked how architects understand the word "landscape," and how else they might understand it. The symposium drew forth an understanding of landscape that went beyond its aesthetic appeal as scenery, toward an idea that is a defining force in Thompson's decision-making – that landscape is also the site of life.

In fact, Thompson writes in Leon van Schaik's monograph on her practice, "I think site and architecture exist in a continuum with their situation, part of a series, of a collection, contributing to a contiguous whole. There are two aspects to this: the first is to do with buildings as part of a greater composite; the second is to do with an ecological integrity. Both acknowledge the interconnectivity and interdependence of architecture with site and situation."[2]

Thompson's architectural processes bring together experiential concerns of building with considerations of place. The relationship made with landscape in its scenic understanding is defined throughout the work from within and without: low horizontal forms, buried or partially embedded buildings, landscaped settings, and deep verandahs overlapping the internal/external threshold.

Increasingly, Thompson's understanding of place includes modes of landscape architecture and ecology, so that the structural and formal responses are shaped by the way that the building can participate in the site's ecosystem across multiple scales. This is expressed with a straightforwardness that is surprisingly uncommon in architecture generally, such as buildings that can flood and buildings that allow water to move underneath. These moves represent a simple yet profound reckoning with a building's physicality that is rarely made on the terms of the ecosystem.

The straightforwardness in resolution comes from a sophistication in the way Thompson integrates the ecological intentions with the experiential, connecting the use and user to the place in ways that bridge the nature/culture divide. One is embedded, elevated, transported around, and "held" in these places that overlap the cultural and ecological. She shows us how we might understand landscape in regard to architecture.

Buildings are typically incompatible with ecological integrity, conservation and ecosystem repair either at their sites or in the larger landscape beyond the "boundary" – not to mention their extractive beginnings, energy-intensive lives and wasteful endings. As we learn how buildings could play a part in repairing ecosystems, beyond a picturesque response to landscape, much of Thompson's architecture offers deeply convincing guidance. Two examples in particular resonate: the new buildings at Bundanon Art Museum and Bridge and the (shortlisted) design competition entry for the Shepparton Art Museum (SAM).

The 2016 SAM competition called for an art museum in the Victorian regional town of Kanny-goopna/Shepparton, located on Yorta Yorta Country on the floodplain of the Goulburn River, at the edge of the city fabric in the mowed grass of Victoria Park. KTA's approach to the brief, in collaboration with landscape architect Simon Ellis, was to invite the river in, making room for it and restoring a version of the riverside vegetation in place of the mown grass. The form and its siting came after this intention. The program would be elevated, creating a floodable undercroft that could be inhabited by an ephemeral river habitat. The elevated plan would be scalloped to allow sunlight to access the undercroft, creating a sort of anti-form where the requirements of the regeneration and system inform the eventual shape and plan logic. The building would address both civic and "natural" conditions in a moment of connection between the two through the section, where it would invite the river in underneath and connect to the urban context on the opposite side of the first floor, overlapping them. Whereas the town generally turns its back on the river, KTA's design envisioned the ground plane as a public space, joining the civic and river fabrics. Here, the civic and ecological repair would be interdependent. In contrast, Denton Corker Marshall's winning, built design for the museum, which opened in 2021, reinforced the mowed grass through the creation of an artificial hill on which the building was placed, separating it from the flooding (one hopes).

At Bundanon, a large property in southern New South Wales gifted to the nation by Arthur Boyd and his wife Yvonne,[3] multiple new buildings by KTA (art museum, collection store and visitor facilities) extend concepts of ecosystem repair. The program is separated into smaller components that embed (the art museum buried in a reinstated hill for thermal stability and fire protection) or elevate (visitor facilities in the Bridge for Creative Learning).

The land on which the Bundanon Trust properties are sited – more than 1,000 hectares abutting the Shoalhaven River – is undergoing large-scale ecosystem regeneration through the Living Landscape project.[4] The theme of elevated buildings that release the ground plane is developed here in the literal bridge form of the visitors' facilities (cafe, guest accommodation and protected undercover spaces). The 165-metre-long trestle bridge allows the ephemeral watercourse and "wet gully" landscape below, which was previously mowed, to function unimpeded. This landscape, which can be wet or dry, has been wet for most of 2022, supporting the newly planted indigenous plants.

In this project, Thompson worked closely with Nicole Thompson and the late Megan Wraight (Wraight and Associates), and ecologist, architect and landscape architect Craig Burton. Together, they mapped the dynamic plant communities in relation to the pastoral clearings as well as the phenomenon of the wet and dry gullies that brought forth the necessary entanglement of the site's topography, hydrology and ecology. Wraight and Associates was part of the original core design team; its site analysis and preparation of the vegetation management plan underpinned early site-wide design intentions established with KTA, such as the circulation approach, a strategy of repair of endemic plant communities alongside the Boyds' domestic exotic cottage garden. In time, and through the management oversight of Bundanon's ecologist Michael Andrews, a rebalanced landscape will develop and form the setting that Thompson imagined.

Similar thinking around repair and renewal can be found in earlier work, such as House at Lake Connewarre (2002), on the land of the Wadawurrung People in Victoria.[5] The site response – which situated the house at the edge of an escarpment, at the threshold between exotic and indigenous landscapes – was a collaborative one with landscape architects Fiona Harris and Tim Nicholas, and it is typical of KTA's consistent cooperation with landscape architects, ecologists and others from whom the practice wants to learn. The project catalysed the client's regeneration of the lake's edge.

Today, the relationship between architecture and landscape is being dismantled and re-understood in ecological terms through an evolving lens of climate change and biodiversity loss. Architects are increasingly responding to the assertive voice of the landscape itself, such as the Goulburn River's flooding of greater Shepparton in October 2022. Thompson is a pioneer on this front.

— Louise Wright is a co-founder of Baracco and Wright Architects, a small experimental practice based in Melbourne.

(FOOTNOTES)

(1) Architecture Media, "The Architecture Symposium: A Broader Landscape," curated by Kerstin Thompson and Phillip Arnold, 18–19 November 2022, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW; designspeaks.com.au/events/2022/11/18/the-architecture-symposium-sydney-2022.

(2) Kerstin Thompson, quoted in Leon van Schaik, *Kerstin Thompson Architects: Encompassing People and Place* (Port Melbourne: Thames and Hudson Australia, 2021), 51.

(3) The people of the Dharawal and Dhurga language groups are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which Bundanon sits. In Dharawal, the word bundanon means "deep valley."

(4) See Landcare Australia, "Introduction to the Living Landscape Project," bundanon.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/1-Introduction-to-the-Living-Landscape-Project.pdf.

(5) In the Wathawurrung language, Lake Connewarre is Kunawarr keelingk, meaning "black swan lake."

(OPPOSITE) The Bridge at Bundanon, New South Wales (2021). Photograph: Rory Gardiner.

(ABOVE) Shepparton Art Museum competition concept design (2016). Image: KTA.

Landscape and interconnectivity: Selected projects

When compiling the list of visionary architects for my book *Imagining the Future Museum: 21 Dialogues with Architects*, the choice of inviting Kerstin Thompson was clear. With her colleagues at KTA, she has created key references for the field, pointing to the future of art museums. Her designs are informed by sensitivity to nature and to native and ancestral practice as well as a keen understanding of the demands of today's artists and the needs of contemporary audiences. Kerstin Thompson's architecture gives form to the best of what a public institution can be: generous, welcoming, open, inclusive, and comfortable.

— András Szántó
New York-based cultural strategy advisor and author

(ABOVE RIGHT) House at Lake Connewarre, Victoria (2002). Photograph: Patrick Bingham-Hall.

(ABOVE LEFT) Royal Botanic Gardens Cranbourne Visitors' Centre, Melbourne (2005 and 2009). Photograph: Leo Showell.

Kerstin, hi.

You always put the other person first.

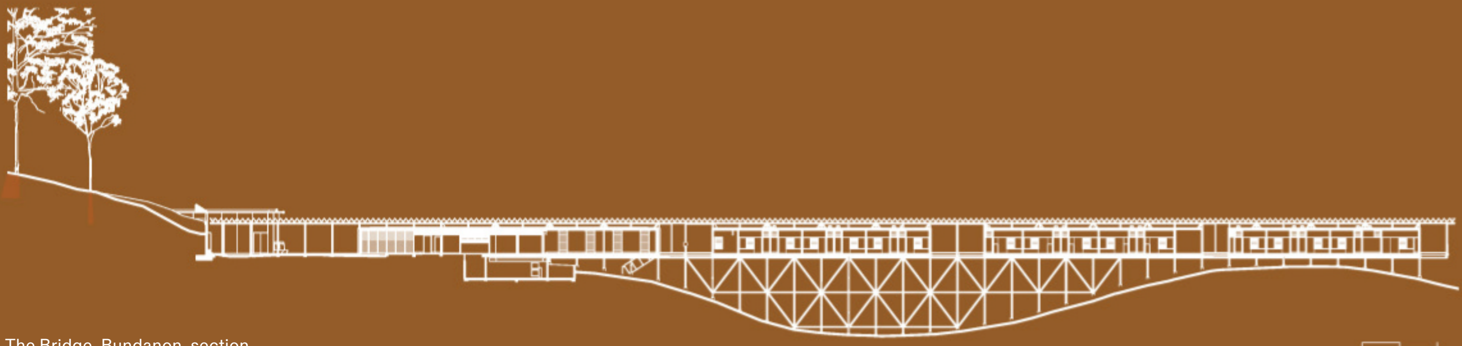
Notably, you have also consistently shunned myth-making, and eschewed the self-congratulatory and self-referential air that so often accompanies the pursuit of recognition and achievement. That self-effacement lends your architecture a persistent and clarifying dignity, which also resides in your professional and personal being. And so, to speak about the dignity of your architecture is to simultaneously speak of your spirit.

In your eponymous practice, you have been assisted by extraordinary people – colleagues and clients – who are devoted to you because they recognize this same dignified spirit.

Your architecture coalesces histories, ecologies and the ecstasies of being into exquisite spatial studies of human togetherness. That purity of intention belies the difficulty of achievement, and the sheer, exhaustive effort of delivering – again and again – architecture of empathic materiality and unparalleled distinction.

All of this, while you remain constant for all of us, always supporting and inspiring – a bright, shining light on the broad horizon of the field, and an extraordinary architect and friend, who deserves the highest esteem that can be bestowed.

— Mat Hinds and Poppy Taylor
Founders, Taylor and Hinds



The Bridge, Bundanon, section
1:1000

Kerstin Thompson gave an inspirational talk at the Architecture Speaks lecture series that I have curated since 2016 in collaboration with the Museum of Finnish Architecture. The reason I wanted to invite her was especially the extraordinary Bundanon Art Museum and Bridge project, where she has combined landscape, art and structure into an elegant whole. I have never met Kerstin in person, but even online she was capable of transmitting a relaxed, warm, engaged and profound connection to both the audience and her own work. She has a seldom-seen capacity to combine the poetic with the pragmatic in her projects.

– Jenni Reuter
Associate professor,
Aalto University, Finland

It was a privilege, and an especially happy, rewarding experience, to work with Kerstin on the Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA) project. Her analytical insight, poetic sensibility, material resourcefulness and openness to dialogue, testing and collaboration with the client and brief was evident at every stage.

Kerstin always looked to refine and expand possibilities. At one point in the project, although we were already advanced down a path, we continued to test the design architecturally and curatorially; this led to further design thinking. Kerstin's astute sensitivity, spatial intelligence and responsiveness delivered a renewed, inspired proposition, which has delivered in spades.

MUMA is a rare, distinguished example of an architect rising to the challenge of museum architecture – deftly expressing an architectural identity while sensitively balancing the demands of museological discipline, curatorial flexibility and the creation of a social space – plus glamour at night!

— Max Delany
Artistic director and CEO, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art; Former director, Monash University Museum of Art

(ABOVE) Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA), Melbourne (2010). Photograph: Trevor Mein; Sketch: Kerstin Thompson.

(BELOW) Jock Comini Reserve Amenities, Victoria (2019). Photograph: Dan Preston; Sketch: Kerstin Thompson.

Landscape has always been integral to Kerstin's architectural thinking. Our collaboration grew from friendship, early in our professional lives, into a long-term dialogue through design where landscape and architecture mutually enfold. Each project was approached as an indivisible whole. Design began onsite and continued as an embodied drawing-thinking process together with site, along with a rigorous and open-minded exploration of ideas. I, as a landscape architect, was invited into projects early and on equal terms. In this Kerstin was ahead of her time.

— Fiona Harrisson
Senior lecturer in landscape architecture, School of Architecture and Urban Design, RMIT University

Kerstin Thompson has been a significant part of building the local architecture culture in Melbourne. In addition to the directorship of her thriving practice, Kerstin is also an architecture adjunct professor at RMIT Architecture and has maintained a close association with our school, including as one of our alumni and past practitioner-academics.

Kerstin has a large following among this generation of architecture students, as the concerns of her practice – including the importance of local conditions, landscape and community – and the way that they are deployed and realized through architectural design projects resonate strongly. She is immensely generous with her time and engages with numerous schools, mentoring and supporting the next generation of architects. Kerstin has made a significant contribution through her built projects, which have been highly awarded. Her active commitment to making a real contribution to building a design culture in the place where she works – and her impact on this design culture – needs to be acknowledged and celebrated.

— Professor Vivian Mitsogianni
Dean, School of Architecture and Urban Design, RMIT University

In our partnership with KTA over recent years, we have found Kerstin to be a creative beacon within the industry. She works to the highest standards, guiding her team to lead with heart, a social conscience, integrity and passion. This is evident in all aspects of KTA's work, especially in the level of commitment and pride they show towards even their smallest public projects. Culturally sensitive, sustainable and inclusive design values are not only Kerstin's hallmark, but part of her deep architectural, human-centred personal conviction.

— Gretel Bakker
Founder and managing director, Performance Frontiers

Accommodating people: A house as a portrait

"Without frank communication between architect and client, even the finest ideas will likely perish," writes Thompson. In 2018, KTA designed Albury House for Jane and Vic Carroll. A written exchange between Kerstin and Jane delves into common questions about the architect–client relationship.

`EAST ALBURY, NSW                    FEBRUARY 2020`

Dear Kerstin,

When my mum Jeanie was an old lady, she only asked for one thing: "I just want to stay in my own house. Is that so much to ask?" She stayed living alone on the farm in the house we all grew up in for a long time, but in the end she became too frail physically and mentally to look after herself and she had to leave her home of nearly 60 years. It was really sad.

After she left, the house began to fall down. The floor subsided, the roof leaked and cracks you could put your arm through opened up in the brick walls. I thought: It's as if its missing her so much its giving up without her. Can a house have a spirit?

Yes, I think houses can have spirit – as in a kind of atmospheric and physical residue left by the lives, habits of being, of those that inhabited them. I think I sometimes over-read this spirit into the house. And admit that once the occupants have left, their belongings gone, most houses feel abandoned, a husk. And when worn, stained, especially if damaged too, then they can feel to me like a passing, a death of sorts. A gone spirit.

I knew, actually, that the foundations, without Jeanie's constant watering of the garden, had dried out and shifted, causing the walls to crumble. But the feeling of their connectedness – my mum and the house – stayed with me. It was the kernel for a book I wrote called Thambaroo, about a boy, an old woman and an empty house.

I would like to read this book.

Of course, I don't really think a house has a spirit like a living thing, but I do feel I relate to my place where I live and that somehow it relates back to me. I don't know Albury House very well yet – not compared with my childhood home or the Cooma house where I lived for 25 years – but it's exciting, this new relationship.

It's certainly mutual. The house is defined, adjusted by you, how you use and occupy it, and of course if you've been the client for its inception then clearly you've guided its nature into being. But also, yes – you adjust to it, your gait to its steps, your pacings to the lengths of it rooms, your turnings from or to its light, your muscles to the force/weight of its doors and so on. You seek shelter below its verandahs, breeze from its louvres. It moves you around according to season, time of day, age and stage, activity. (By "you," I mean whoever – "one," etc.)

So, in our early interrelating with a house, we take some time to get to know what feels most right and also to identify points of resistance, encumbrances it might place upon us.

Our house is strong. It's not going anywhere. I know a tree could fall on it or a fire demolish it, but I still think it's saying: I'm here to stay. "Strong" is sure, safe, reliable and reassuring. I love the strength of the house. But strong can also be unyielding.

This is particularly intriguing to me. It challenges a hope I hold dear for our houses – that in their strength is clarity (clarity = strength of character and therefore distinguishable, identifiable. Something that in being known can be countered, challenged, resisted) that can take anything, and in this way be ultimately forgiving, accommodating.

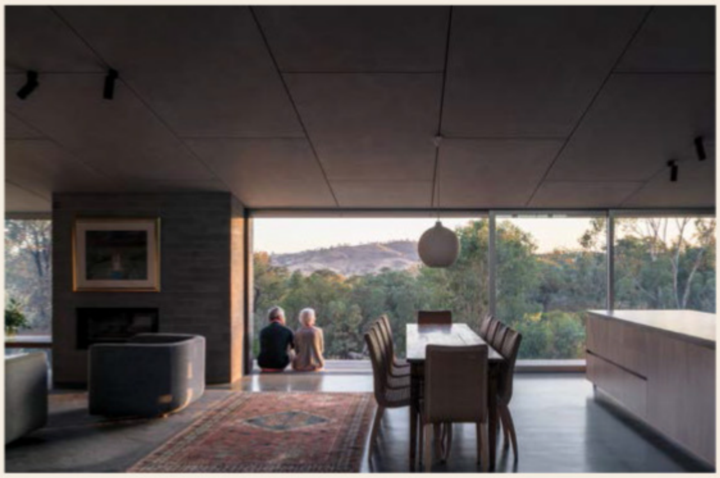
Sometimes I feel I bump up against it with my decorating of a cushion here or an ornament there. And the walls seem to shrug off our paintings at times. Vic has felt it too. I don't mind any of this demanding of respect, I like it. The house is not a mere background for us to slap anything onto it and be done with it. It challenges us to find harmony and balance and to take our time with this as we settle together.

I think in time you'll worry less about the wall and think to hell with it – this cushion, vase, chair is going there. And this one too and so on until you've encouraged the wall back, where it belongs, as secondary, which is not to say neutral/uncontributing to the life and signs of life around it. Just not directing it.

There's a feeling of calm, don't you think? It's something we had in our house in Cooma too, and I wonder if it's not only the bush and the spacious simplicity but if it's us as well. Can a house be sensitive to its occupiers' mood and personality?

I think a house, if it fits, always somehow reflects the people it's designed for. I've often talked about a house as a portrait of the people and place for which it has come into being. In terms of your house feeling calm, I attribute this to you both. And the way in which it's so very grounded in its site. The stepped floor following the slope of the land, the roof gently pushing down, the mass of the concrete and brickwork helps pull us closer to the earth, terra firm. There's something too about the long rectangle – especially of the main window south – that instills a sense of calm. The architecture has a stillness that leaves one's thoughts unencumbered, uninterrupted by superfluous details, architectural tinkerings.

I think the house is happy in the landscape and confidently takes its place, reflecting back its own beauty. One of my favourite things still is the way it opens up to the view as you walk in. It's so clever at opening up and closing down and revealing surprises every time you change your perspective, especially from the louvred verandah. I really love that and never get complacent about it.



(ABOVE) Albury House, Victoria (2018). Photographs: Dan Preston.

From experience, my own and clients', this reward will continue, never exhaust itself. A good house delights every day and each time it feels new in the spark of "aah" it triggers. And this is perhaps the best reason for why architecture matters so very much: the daily joy, conscious and subliminal, it can bestow on its occupants.

It took me a while to get used to the lighting. No flooding of bright light, but directed and making pools of light and shadow. I don't even think of it now, which must mean that I like it and would not want anything else. It's never been a problem for Vic. He loved it straight away. In fact, I think he loved everything about the house straight away. He could always imagine better than I could, and it's what he imagined.

Yes, a modulation of light and dark, intensities of both, is my preferred, and I think greatly contributes to the sense of intimacy a house can hold, especially in the pool of light surrounded by darkerness. You might enjoy reading In Praise of Shadows *by Tanizaki. He beautifully describes why darkness is so important and sadly so under threat by a western zeal to dispel it in too much, ill-considered, light.*

I found it interesting, yours and Vic's different ways of working through the design and building process. This is not uncommon, that one of a couple wrestles more with what's on offer. Actually, I think the questioning of the design is important to help reach the best solution. Some resistance from a client can be a useful form of extra briefing. It helps us understand your hopes/fears and the challenge prompts us to find alternative ways to address those, and to work out what's essential to the design, what's still in play and so on.

Kerstin, I could say more! There's the living room, our bedroom, the south-eastern verandah … I could talk about every room and its particular effect on me, but maybe I'm overloading you with my observations and revelations. It might be better to stop here for the moment. Do you have questions and responses so far? And I have a couple of questions too. Were there things you would have preferred to do differently?

No.

Did we curtail you in any way?

No.

The existence of this house, with its strength and beauty and confidence and its sometimes uncompromising nature, is because of you. The balancing act of an architect engaging with her clients while she maintains her own authenticity must be a challenge as well as, hopefully, a source of satisfaction.

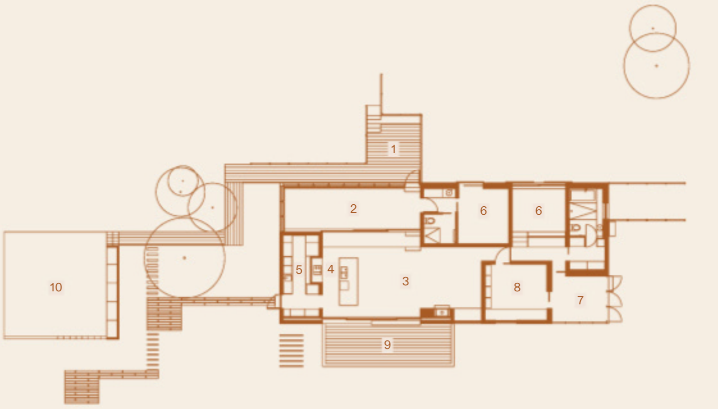
I've written a little bit about this tension between a design intent and its compatibility with our keenness and professional ethic to stay open and responsive to a client's inputs and desires for the architecture. I use the word "accommodate," in an active sense. It is how I think of an integrous, right-fitting building. A compromise means I've failed to find this fit between its context – people, site, etc. – and an idea, concept. And it's about the building having an authenticity – for its occupants, for the site, for the discipline of architecture, rather than for the architect.

You're so busy, I know. Hope you have time for this.
Jane x

PS About my mum's house, the one we all grew up in … My sister, who lives on the farm, said to her family, "We can fix it or we can pull it down. But I will not have the sheep walking through it while it subsides into the dirt." Her kids were ambivalent so, like the little red hen, she said, "All right, I'll fix it myself." And she did. Jeanie, our mother, would absolutely love it.

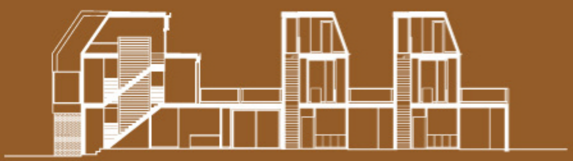
(ALBURY HOUSE FLOOR PLAN KEY)

1 Courtyard
2 Verandah/breezeway
3 Living/dining
4 Kitchen
5 Butler's pantry
6 Bedroom
7 Sleep-out/breezeway
8 Study
9 Deck
10 Carport



Albury House floor plan
1:500

Accommodating people: Selected projects



Napier Street Housing long section
1:500

Kerstin Thompson's delicate work – her poetic use of space, soft materials, and the interplay of light and shadow – honours the architecture profession. For the Architects, not Architecture international speakers program, we were curious about how Kerstin's path and experiences shaped her design philosophy and her bond between people and environment. In her talk, she took us on a journey highlighting early mentors, formative encounters, travels and discoveries. We can still recall her description of walking for hours along the Lurujarri Trail on the coast of Western Australia – the way it cultivates an appreciation for the ground beneath your feet, as well as a keen awareness of your surroundings. As Kerstin said, "There is nothing like walking for hours to really appreciate the ground you might otherwise take for granted; an increased attuneness, sensitivity and capacity to see the minutest of variations in its condition."

— Fermín Tribaldos
Co-founder, Architects, not Architecture

(ABOVE)	Napier Street Housing, Melbourne (2001). Photograph: Patrick Bingham-Hall.
(RIGHT)	House at Big Hill, Victoria (2011). Photograph: Trevor Mein.
(OPPOSITE ABOVE)	House at Hanging Rock, Victoria (2014). Photograph: Erieta Attali.
(OPPOSITE BELOW)	KTA's Lothian Street studio, 2023.

I met Kerstin in the late Eighties, introduced at a party by a mutual friend. I had just begun looking for a coastal block, on which I planned to build a hexagonal kit home. Kerstin argued passionately that good architecture was not constrained by price. So, would she design my house knowing my price constraints and limited imagination? She did not hesitate; we shook on it and a journey began.

Ten years on, I asked Kerstin to visit a desolate farm block I had fallen in love with. In spite of her workload, she drove down the coast with me, as she had done twice before. I clearly remember her, dressed for her Fitzroy practice, confidently negotiating the locked farm gate and fending off nervous cattle. Not all heroes wear capes.

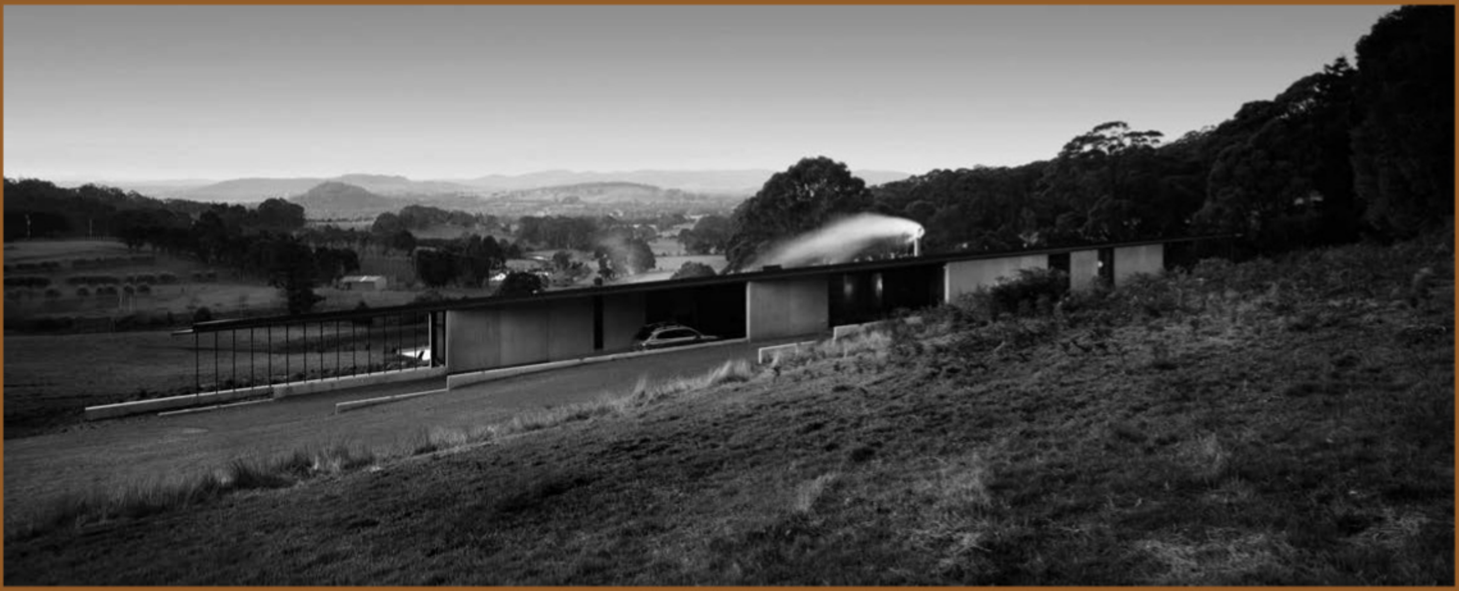
Months later, with the land acquired, Simone from KTA camped on the block to better envisage what was possible. I had no idea how remarkable the vision was.

My home is now 20 years old and it continues to evolve and inspire. I've loved every moment.

— Garry Lipshut
KTA client

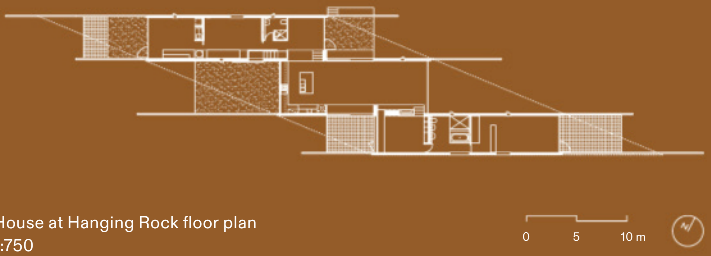
I have known Kerstin for a long time, since she was a recent graduate teaching at RMIT, and we kept in touch after she established her practice. When she showed me over one of her earliest projects – a tricky Fitzroy house conversion – I recall wondering how so young an architect could be so competent and clear about what they were doing. That clarity is the quality that strikes me still.

— Harriet Edquist
Emeritus professor, RMIT University



Kerstin Thompson's House at Hanging Rock was always going to be a rewarding experience. It was on our second studio visit, when Kerstin showed us her design concept model, that I knew that she had my total trust. I was very moved by the elegance of the rhomboid-shaped roof and the simplicity of the long, low house design. I could see it sitting gracefully in the ground, surrounded by nature and offering views both distant and close. Precast concrete walls, textures, reflections and a refined, robust feel were agreed to – it was important to keep Kerstin's vision on track. Kerstin is a very understated, creative and clever person. Highly attuned to people's desires and needs, she is able to meet these calmly, without compromising her own strong artistic vision.

— Titania Henderson
KTA client



House at Hanging Rock floor plan
1:750

Kerstin is collaborative and inclusive. She never expresses her thinking as "I"; it is always "we." This eliminates an oppositional approach and leads to a creative projection of her unique design capacity that reflects the client's brief and lifestyle, and blends the professional and the personal.

One example, among many, is Kerstin's conversion, 20 years ago, of our sheet-metal factory into a residence that she called "the Drum House." Kerstin integrated the industrial pulley and sheet metal into the design as a reminder of the factory's original use. She also inserted a large, open, glass "drum," creating light, air and space in the undefined living areas.

We have worked with Kerstin more than once and, as she predicted, we have continually enjoyed new and surprising experiences from her designs.

— Beth Charles and Ron Merkel
KTA clients

Kerstin and I have both lived in Fitzroy for a long time – in Kerstin's case, making a small community around a garden courtyard since 2001. Her innovative approach to renovating a nineteenth-century warehouse complex by sharing with other households and her office was uncommon in those days. A collective space for kids playing, adults socializing and supporting each other, visitors being welcomed. A wonderful trial of communal living within an active urban fabric. More recently, we have discussed the social question of how to care for elderly parents, and that perhaps Fitzroy can provide an answer for this, too.

— Marika Neustupny
Director, NMBW Architecture Studio

Selected awards

Kerstin Thompson Architects is the recipient of more than 100 awards, from which the following have been selected.

(2022)
Bundanon Art Museum
and Bridge
Sir Zelman Cowen Award
for Public Architecture
and Award for Sustainable
Architecture, Australian Institute
of Architects (National)
Sulman Medal for Public
Architecture and Award for
Sustainable Architecture,
Australian Institute of Architects
(NSW Chapter)
World Architecture Festival,
Highly Commended, Completed
Buildings – Culture

Queen and Collins
Urban Design Award,
Melbourne Awards
Award for Commercial
Architecture, Australian Institute
of Architects (National)
Melbourne Prize, Australian
Institute of Architects
(Vic. Chapter)

Balfe Park Lane
Best Overend Award
for Residential Architecture
– Multiple, Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

Clyde Street Primary School
Best Primary School Project,
Victorian School Design Awards
Learning Environments
Australasia Award (Vic. Chapter),
New Educational Campus

Kerstin Thompson
Contribution to Architecture
Award, World Architecture News
Female Frontier Awards

(2021)
Broadmeadows Town Hall
Best in Architectural Design,
Victorian Premier's
Design Awards

(2020)
Albury House
Robin Boyd Award
for Residential Houses – New,
Australian Institute
of Architects (National)

Broadmeadows Town Hall
Victorian Architecture Medal,
John George Knight Award
for Heritage Architecture
and Commendation for Public
Architecture, Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

(2019)
Private Melbourne
Women's Club
Award for Commercial
Architecture, Australian Institute
of Architects (National)
Sir Osborn McCutcheon Award
for Commercial Architecture,
Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

Jock Comini Reserve Amenities
Nicholas Murcutt Award
for Small Project Architecture,
Australian Institute
of Architects (National)
Award for Small Project
Architecture, Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

Sacred Heart,
Abbotsford Convent
Commendation for Heritage
Architecture, Australian Institute
of Architects (National)
John George Knight Award
for Heritage Architecture,
Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

Northcote High School,
Performing Arts
and VCE Centre
Best School Project Under
$5 Million, Victorian School
Design Awards

(2018)
The Stables,
Victorian College of the Arts,
University of Melbourne
Awards for Heritage Architecture
and Educational Architecture and
Commendation for Interior
Architecture, Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

(2017)
Tarrawarra Cellar Door
Award for Commercial
Architecture, Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

(2014)
House at Hanging Rock
Robin Boyd Award
for Residential Houses – New,
Australian Institute of Architects
(National)
Harold Desbrowe-Annear Award
for Residential Houses – New,
Australian Institute of Architects
(Vic. Chapter)

Wertheim Factory Conversion
Award for Heritage Architecture,
Australian Institute of Architects
(Vic. Chapter)

(BELOW) Thompson with Isabelle Toland of Aileen Sage Architects on a Bundanon site tour, 2021. Photograph: Beatrice Spence.

(2013)
Marysville Police Station
Regional Prize, Australian
Institute of Architects
(Vic. Chapter)

(2012)
House at Big Hill
Award (Vic. Chapter) and
Commendation (National)
for Residential Houses – New,
Australian Institute of Architects

(2011)
Monash University Museum
of Art (MUMA)
Marion Mahoney Award
for Interior Architecture and
Award for Public Alterations and
Additions, Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

Carrum Downs Police Station
Award for Public Architecture,
Australian Institute of Architects
(Vic. Chapter)

(2006)
Royal Botanic Gardens
Cranbourne Visitors' Centre
New Tourism Development
Award, National Tourism Alliance
Architectural Excellence, South
East Awards

Blairgowrie House
Architecture Award of Merit,
Australian Institute
of Architects (National)

(2003)
House at Lake Connewarre
Harold Desbrowe-Annear Award
for Residential Houses – New,
Australian Institute of Architects
(Vic. Chapter)

(2002)
Napier Street Housing
Award for Residential Architecture
– Multiple, Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

(2000)
Kerstin Thompson Architects
Seppelt Contemporary Art Award
for an outstanding body of work

(1999)
West Coast House
Harold Desbrowe-Annear Award
for Residential Houses – New,
Australian Institute of Architects
(Vic. Chapter)

James Service Place,
South Melbourne
Merit Award, Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

(1996)
Webb Street Fitzroy
Merit Award, Australian Institute
of Architects (Vic. Chapter)

(1993)
Lorne House
Refereed Design Award,
Committee of Heads of
Architecture Schools
in Australasia

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David Hillam, Australian Institute of Architects Chair, WA Practice Committee

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Acknowledgements

This milestone, and the body of work and approach to practice that it acknowledges, is within the context of a life lived through autonomies and partnerings, influences of others both personal and professional: a father's intellectual curiosity, a mother's practicality and drive, a brother's brothership, a daughter's lived experience of my attempts – not always successful – to balance parenting with work, a prior partner respectful of my determination to be present in the industry – which meant less present at home – and a current partner supportive of my determination to maintain visibility as founding principal of a woman-led architectural practice.

Therefore, the bestowing of the Gold Medal – so far overwhelmingly on individuals – gives pause to contemplate one's role relative to that of others within a 30-year practice. KTA started in earnest in 1994. As founder, I have provided the thread of thought continuity along which many have gathered and that many have inflected. I take this opportunity to acknowledge some key contributors and dear collaborators because architecture is typically the work of many:

Michelle Black, first KTA colleague (1994–1997), and contributor to West Coast House.

Lynn Chew, longest KTA colleague, whose relentless kindness, care and empathy towards colleagues and clients are foundational to the practice's culture.

Simone Koch, a gifted and rigorous architect within KTA (1997–2005) and a contributor to House at Lake Connewarre and other early houses.

Kelley Mackay, whose thumbprints are all over KTA and its buildings, especially Carrum Downs Police Station, Balfe Park and Clyde Creek Primary School. From 2005 to 2022, Kelley provided consistently high levels of insight, leadership and determination to the guidance of teams and the frequently hard task of making ordinary buildings excellent by leveraging difficult circumstances to extract architectural opportunity.

More recent collaborators who have joined Lynn and me in the leadership of KTA include Toby Pond, Claire Humphreys and Michael Blancato. To them, and many others listed in our monograph of 2021 who have contributed in various ways to KTA, thank you.

(ABOVE) KTA studio crit, Housing Matters, RMIT University Master of Architecture Design Studios, 2022.

(MIDDLE) *Portrait of Kerstin Thompson Architects* by Luis Ferreiro for Portraits plus Architecture, National Portrait Gallery, 2009.

(BELOW) KTA's Queensberry Street studio, taken for the monograph *Kerstin Thompson Architects: Encompassing People and Place* by Leon van Schaik (Thames and Hudson, 2021). Photograph: Ying Ang.

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